THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON PRESENTATION OF SELF AND PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A COMMUNITY OF RUNNERS

A Dissertation in Instructional Systems
by
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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explored how the social web is impacting the way individuals present themselves to others and function within group settings. The social web is a collection of social networking sites used by an individual to connect with his or her broader social group. What differentiates the social web from its predecessor web-based community sites, such as newsgroups and discussion forums, is that participants interact in the open, in front of not only their intended audience but their unintended audience as well. The web-based activity of a community of endurance athletes was observed over a three-month period during the spring 2012 marathon season. Twenty-one athletes spread out across six time zones participated in the study. A connective ethnographical method was used to track the activity of the participants as they interacted on Twitter, Facebook, Dailymile, blog, and podcasting sites. Screen capturing software was used to collect data. Follow-up questions were handled via email, Instant Messenger, and Twitter Direct Message. Filed notes were also compiled. Data was coded by hand and consisted of identifying key words/phrases used by the participants in order to identify prevalent themes. Using this method, 818 tweets, 65 blog posts, 5 podcasts, 54 Facebook updates, and 20 Dailymile updates were collected and coded. The outcome was a thick description of community activity. Several discoveries were made as a result: Despite being in front of multiple audiences, individuals will display a primary persona on the social web. Communication practices demonstrated the interplay required between human and non-human factors needed to develop and maintain online communities. Patterns of participation indicate how far the Internet has become ingrained in our lives.
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“I ran and ran every day, and I acquired a sense of determination, this sense of spirit that I would never, never, give up, no matter what else happened.”

--Wilma Rudolph
Chapter 1

Introduction

Communities Of Practice And Social Networks

Moving From The First-Generation To The Second-Generation Web

In its original incarnation the World Wide Web was similar television, primarily a one-way mechanism for broadcasting content. A site owner posted content to a static web page hoping that others would visit. Social websites were discussion forums on newsgroups, centering on a single topic or theme. To participate in the conversation, an individual was required to join the site, acquiring a unique user-name and password. An individual interested in learning how to train to run a marathon would go to a web site focused on the topic of running and create an account, which included a username that was different from their actual name, e.g. John Smith would be NewRunner1245. Social websites were similar to the segregated communities commonly found in everyday life offline settings. Discussion forums and newsgroups were virtual versions of clubs and social groups, serving as places where an individual could go and share only a single facet of his or her total identity. Identity was, as Goffman (1959) described it, context specific.

Social websites were destinations; places an individual could go and highlight a single aspect of the self. The John Smith who was NewRunner1245 on a running website was also PAScribe on a creative writing website, and had an account with an email service where his email address was Sportsguy64. John Smith, like everyone participating on these sites, had the luxury of having his audience segregated, where “those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting” (Goffman, 1959, p. 49). However, the luxury of audience segregation on the web was diminished in 2003 when the web shifted from being a destination-centric medium (Web 1.0) to an individual-centric one (Web 2.0).

Several factors combined to cause this shift in perspective: The Web replaced the computer as the platform where software applications resided, software applications worked on
multiple devices without the need to purchase multiple licenses, software user-interfaces became lightweight and intuitive to use, applications were designed for interaction among participants, and applications were able to aggregate, use, and display information in new ways (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; O’Reilly, 2007). A desktop or laptop computer was no longer needed to access the web. Instead, all that was required was a device capable of reaching the web, such as a cellphone or tablet. These new devices were smaller, more powerful than their predecessors, and portable, which meant an individual could access the web anywhere in the world where there was Wi-Fi or cell phone coverage.

The advent of new coding languages, such as Asynchronous Java Script and XML (AJAX) among others, made it possible for data to be uploaded and downloaded faster because a full-page reload was no longer required. New coding languages (PHP, Ruby, ColdFusion, Perl, Python, JSP, and ASP) meant data could be formatted in a manner (XML, RSS, JSON) that allowed applications and websites to freely share information with each other (O’Reilly, 2007). Web developers exposed their code making it possible for other developers to offer enhancements to the existing application or develop complimentary applications of their own. Software developers took advantage of these new coding languages to create applications that were conceptually open in nature, referred to as social networking technologies, “tools that facilitate collective intelligence through social negotiation when participants are engaged in a common goal or a shared practice” (Gunawardena et al., 2008, p.5). This open collaborative environment marked the philosophical shift from was has been termed Web 1.0, or the first generation web, to Web 2.0 (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; O’Reilly, 2007). Instead of seeking fellow runners on a discussion forum, John Smith may now look to social network sites, such as Twitter or Facebook, to find like-minded others.

One of the more dramatic changes resulting from Web 2.0 is in how people interact with one another. The growth of powerful mobile devices, such as smartphones, iPads, and netbooks, allow us to be connected virtually all the time and from anywhere. According to a 2010 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project approximately 75% of American teens and 83% of adults have a cell phone. Twenty-seven percent of teens and 35% of adults use their cell phone to access the Web. While computers are still the dominant means of accessing the Web for both demographic groups, laptop computers have overtaken desktops as the computer of choice for adults under the age of 30 indicating a trend toward mobility.

The Pew study also indicated a growth in the use of social networking web sites. Seventy-three percent of American teens and 47% of adults who are on the Web use an SNS. A
growing number of adults use multiple SNS. According to the study, 29% of adults who responded had a profile on two SNS and 13% had a profile on three or more SNS. Facebook is the most popular SNS with both American teens and adults. Seventy-one percent of teens and 73% of adults who use SNS have a profile on Facebook.

A growing trend in the use of SNS is microblogging. Microblogging is a form of blogging that allows users to post brief text-based updates to their community of followers. These updates are generally limited to 140 characters or less, this limit being based on the Short Message Service (SMS) limit of 160 characters for cell phone messages and representing stream-of-consciousness sharing. In general, microblogging is either sharing what you are currently doing or what is on your mind at the moment. The character limitation inherent in microblogs can be overcome by the inclusion of hyperlinks to expanded content or by attaching multi-media files, such as pictures, movies, and music. Twitter is the most popular microblogging site with over 105 million members. Thirty-seven percent of active users on Twitter use their phone to update their status and 75% of traffic comes from third party applications, such as TweetDeck (Yarrow, 2010). Eight percent of American teens and 19% of adults in the Pew study indicated they have a profile on Twitter.

Another significant technological development is the ability for these sites to communicate with one another. It is common practice among users of SNS and microblogs to update both simultaneously. This can be done either behind the scenes through the permission settings on the profile page or by the inclusion of a hashtag (#), a naming convention for adding additional context and metadata to your tweets. For example, John Smith could use his cellphone to update his Twitter status and by including the hashtag “#fb” in the update his post will automatically appear on his Facebook page as well.

Social Network Sites

In contrast to the first generation Web (1991-2003), which was primarily a content consumption vehicle, Web 2.0 is characterized by its open and participatory nature where people share their perspectives, opinions, thoughts and experiences. Boyd and Ellison (2008, p. 219) state that “[e]arly public online communities such as Usenet and public discussion forums were structured by topics or according to topical hierarchies, but social network sites are structured as personal (or egocentric) networks, with the individual at the center of their own community.”
Separate communities of practice, such as the running site John Smith joined, were being replaced by social network websites such as Friendster (2002), LinkedIn and MySpace (2003), Flickr (2004), YouTube (2005), Facebook and Twitter (2006).

Social network sites (SNS) are web spaces where individuals not only consume information but also create it, and exercise some control over how that information is displayed and accessed (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Thelwall & Stuart, 2009). By design, these sites are not topic centric but instead revolve around the individual. boyd & Ellison (2008) listed three key characteristics that make up an SNS. Social network sites allow individuals to “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). These sites are blank slates where the site owner provides the framework and relies on individuals to supply the content.

In the same article, boyd and Ellison differentiate between a social network and social networking. Social networks are websites; social networking is the acts performed by an individual in order to meet new people, people with similar interests, values, and beliefs. According to boyd & Ellison, individuals do not use social network sites for social networking—networking is defined by them as “looking to meet new people”—but instead are using them to “primarily communicate with people who are already a part of their extended social network” (p. 211). If that were how people are using social network sites, then reviewing an articulated list of users, called Friends on Facebook and Followers on Twitter, one would find these lists to be comprised of the names of the individual’s family, friends, and acquaintances, people they already know offline, in the terrestrial world.

Communities of Practice

Communities, online or offline, are comprised of a group of individuals who come together based on common interests, beliefs, or values. Community members share a common culture that they perpetuate through the development of norms and practices that are meant to create the desired attitude and behaviors required for membership. Communities are bounded by a spatial geography and member activity takes place in an area designated by the members as appropriate, whether this be between the walls of the community center where a group of runners
meet or in a segregated discussion forum dedicated to new runners found on a website about running.

Research on online communities indicates, individuals join communities because they are looking to exchange information, participating in an activity, seeking out a social support system, looking to build friendships, or all four (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2006; Hiltz, 1985; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Reingold, 1993; Ridings & Geffen, 2004; & Wenger, 2000).

Online communities of this type are also called *communities of practice* (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Communities of Practice (CoP) are defined as “groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006). Communities of practice emerge when there is enough common interest around a topic and CoP persist over time when members are willing to invest themselves in creating a shared sense of meaning with others around the topic (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2006). Wenger (2006) states there are three characteristics that are necessary for a group to be considered a CoP: the domain, the community, and the practice.

According to Wegner, to say a group has a *domain of interest* implies that they interests and actions goes beyond what is found in a gathering of friends or a social network. “Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). Regarding the *community*, Wegner states, “In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from one another” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). Finally, Wegner distinguishes between a community of practice and a community of interest. “Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). By Wegner’s definition a group of friends interested in endurance sports would not necessarily be a CoP if their interest remained at a casual level. However, this group, or a subset of this group could become a CoP if their interactions moved beyond the casual and into the more focused realm of actually doing something. It is when all three characteristics are present at the same time that a CoP may be said to exist (Wegner, 2006).

Communities of practice also require boundaries, whether physical (Goffman, 1959, 1963) or conceptual, existing in the minds of the members (Cohen, 2008). Boundaries serve to separate CoP from the rest of the world and this separation informs the individual of the
performance expectations required of them in the CoP setting (Goffman, 1959). Conversely, boundaries also signal to the individual that they have entered an area where they are safe from outside judgment and free to explore fully a specific aspect of the self (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Ridings & Gefen, 2004).

Comparing Social Network Sites And Communities of Practice

Social websites between the first-generation and second-generation web differ in both the technology used by individuals to interact with one another and in the purpose of the interaction (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). Social websites during the first-generation web (Web 1.0) were made up of discussion forums and newsgroups. These sites were centered on a specific topic and were structured in a hierarchical fashion (boyd & Ellison, 2008, Wu, 2012). Individuals used these sites to meet strangers who share a specific interest. In enough interest was aroused a CoP would form where community members would work together in support of a common goal (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser, Fontaine, Slusher, 2000; Wegner 2000, 2006).

Social websites in the Web 2.0 age consist of sites such as Twitter and Facebook. These sites are centered on the individual (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Wu, 2012). Social networking sites are websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, where individuals create, share, and consume information with other people with whom they have a previously established relationship offline. The purpose of participating on these sites is not to pursue a specific interest, but, rather, to extend existing relationships. Table 1-1 compared the dimensions of CoP and SNS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1-1 Comparison Between Communities of Practice and Social Networking Sites</th>
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<td>Communities of Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bounded</td>
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<td>Closed—membership required</td>
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<td>Hierarchical structure</td>
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<td>Topic-centric</td>
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<td>Individuals come together based on a common</td>
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Table 1-1 highlights two critical differences between social network sites and their predecessors, newsgroups and discussion forums. Unlike their predecessors, which were segregated and centered by a topic, social networks center on the individual. With discussion forums everyone who joined was part of the community and had access to read, comment, and create new content visible to everyone. While being a closed community centered around a single topic, once inside the individual had open access to all content. Social network sites function the opposite way. In SNS such as Facebook and Twitter each individual serves as the center of his or her network. To be precise, the individual is the center of all his/her networks covering multiple topics. It is common in these sites for an individual to be the center of networks related to hobbies or interests, family and friends, as well as work and other responsibilities. “Rather than relating to one group, people live and work in multiple sets of overlapping relationships, cycling among different networks” (Wellman et al. 2002, p. 160). The individual chooses the people in their network and these people by default are not segregated by categories of interest or roles. This means that thoughts shared about and meant for a specific group, e.g. if John Smith posted the results of a recent run, that post will potentially be read by all the members of his various networks. On a SNS, John Smith, as is everyone’s, unintended audience is greater than the intended one.

A second critical difference between CoP on a discussion forum as opposed to a SNS is observed in the shift toward the use of real names. SNS, such as Facebook, require the use of the individual’s real name to join, and while others, such as Twitter do not; it has become common practice for individuals to do so. Several factors most likely contribute to this. Social networking sites are built around a single purpose so a lot of individuals feel the need for multiple outlets of expression. It is not uncommon for members of various networks to microblog on Twitter, have a full blog on another application such as Wordpress or MoveableType where they write and embed images from Flickr or videos from YouTube, and podcasts housed on iTunes. Using a common name or a close proximity makes it easier for individuals to build a more complete
picture of themselves. Using a consistent name also makes it easier to be found. Distance on the web is measured in hyperlinks (Weinberger, 2002), and using a common name in hyperlinks increases the chances an individual will be found on search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing. DiNucci (1999) noted this when, referring to SNS, he said, “The Web will be understood not as screenfulls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens” (p. 32).

But, are SNS simply a web-based extension of existing relationships or are they also a place for finding others, strangers, who share similar interests? If the former were the case then an SNS would be different from other online meeting sites, such as discussion forums and newsgroups, in that it would be possible for a CoP to form on the latter, but not on an SNS. In a blog post on Lithosphere, Wu (2012) differentiates between social networks and online communities. According to Wu, the primary difference between these sites is in the way people are connected. On SNS, individuals are joined together by “pre-established interpersonal relationships.” Connections between individuals are made “one at a time.” The primary motivation for an individual to join a SNS is to “maintain old relationships and establish new ones to expand their network.” Wu contrasts SNS with online communities, which he says are held together by a common “interest,” “goal,” or “project” (p/5283). Online communities are places an individual goes to extend pre-existing, individual relationships.

Communities Of Practice On Social Networking Sites

On the surface, it would seem that the characteristics that make up a CoP are not compatible with the characteristics of a SNS. Historically, online CoP came together on first-generation web applications, discussion forums and newsgroups. Communities formed when individuals who share a common, passionate interest in something come together to support each and learn from one another. The overarching purpose of a CoP is the achievement of a goal. This goal can be a collective goal, such as civic improvement, or a personal goal, such as when a community of endurance athletes comes together to help each other improve (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 2006; & Wu, 2012). In contrast, SNS were born of the second-generation web. These applications are not bound by a topic of interest and instead consist of a series of overlapping, pre-existing social relations where the individual sits as the central point of contact (boyd & Ellision, 2008; Haythonthwaite, 2002; Wellman B., Boase J., Chen W. 2010). However,
these distinctions presuppose that individuals treat these constructs as separate entities. But, what if people did use SNS for social networking? Is it possible to network on an SNS? If so, is it then is it possible for an online community to form on a SNS?

Gunawardena et al. (2009) define the act of social networking as “the practice of expanding knowledge by making connections with individuals of similar interests” (p. 4). SNS, defined Wellman B., Boase J., Chen W. (2010) as systems that enable users to interact and share information, transcend conventional notions of time and place, enabled people to self-organize around common interests regardless of geographical constraints into networked individualism where “boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are flatter and more recursive” (p. 160). Making the individual, as opposed to a website, the center of multiple, egocentric networks.


Recent research has focused on the emergence in popularity of SNS. Individuals use these sites to form various social networks in which they have multiple roles oftentimes in overlapping contexts. Wilson (2006) explored how youth culture used SNS in combined online and offline settings for social resistance practices. boyd and Heer (2006) explored how profiles on the social networking site Friendster were used to shape both the owner’s identity and the identities of the owner’s friends. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) explored how college students use Facebook to build social capital. boyd (2008) explored the role of social networking sites in the social life of teenagers. Lange (2008) explored how youth and young adults use YouTube’s sharing and commenting features to present an identity that supports inclusion into certain desired social groups. Livingstone (2008) explored the differences in the way younger and older teenagers crafted their identity on social networking sites. People are using SNS to network, going beyond pre-existing relationships in offline settings and seeking out strangers with similar

**CoP That Use SNS: Presentation of Self and Community Function**

What does this shift from a CoP moving from context specific situations to a scenario of overlapping social networks mean for how individuals present ourselves to others? The philosopher William James stated that individuals have “as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares” (Wozniak, 1999). Individuals tend to show a different facet of themselves to each of these different groups in phenomenon Goffman (1959) referred to as “audience segregation” where a person will express different aspects of themself to different audiences depending upon the context. However, by definition and design, SNS technologies do not accommodate this practice, compromising the ability of an individual to be who or what the situation calls for. On SNS co-workers, peers, and bosses see a more personal side and friends and family may observe interacting in a more professional sphere, creating a tension between our front-stage and back-stage selves (Chamber, 2012; Murthy, 2012; & Goffman, 1959). McLuhan (2003) noted this tension when discussing the impact of new media on individuals and society: "Our private and corporate lives have become information processes just because we have put our central nervous system outside us in electric technology" (p. 63).

Web 2.0 technologies, of which SNS are a part, have connected our online and offline lives (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Gunawardena et al 2009; Hine, 2000; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). For example, when John Smith returns from a training run, he may immediately sync his Ipod Nano with his iTunes account, which will send his data to a Nike website, which in turn would forward that data to his Dailymile workout website, which in turn will auto posts the data to his Twitter and Facebook accounts, where everyone in his social network could see it. A fellow athlete may comment on his results and John replies, perhaps from his Android smart phone or his iPad, or MacBook, depending on he is, what he happens to be doing, and what type of response is called for. That’s a personal description; however, how John may do things professionally in much the same manner. He may even use the same devices and SNS to communicate with his peers. Perhaps some of his professional peers are also part of my running network.
The easier technology makes it for people to connect the more difficult; it seems, for them to keep their various networks separated. SNS are places individuals are going to share and articulate different characteristics of themselves with their various communities, and they shift the prism of their identity to fit the context of the situation. However, that distinction may be made solely in the mind, and the reality in which the self is shared may be much larger (Cohen, 2008). Thus, a paradox concerning identity exists on SNS where individuals perceive and communicate in context, to a specific audience; however, in actuality, they are expressing themselves to every member in their network. This raises questions as to how individuals present themselves on SNS, particularly when their message is intended for a specific audience, such as a CoP.

Traditionally, communities were framed by geography. Individuals who lived in near enough of a proximity to one another could come together based on common interests, beliefs, or values. As technologies advanced, communities expanded. Initially, this occurred along with advances in the area of transportation and subsequently also through advances in communication (Gleick, 2011). Technological advances in communication have “eliminate[d] time and space factors in human association” (McLuhan, 2003, p. 55), thus questioning the need for geographical proximity as a requirement for individuals to come together and form a community. Using SNS, it is common for communities to exist comfortably crossing between online and offline interactions with individuals located anywhere in the world. Just as it does for identity, SNS impact the norms, behaviors, and practices of communities.

Communities are built around and share a common culture where we are able to “…communicate, perpetuate, and develop knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). In practice, communities are sub-groupings within a larger culture that have a culture all their own. Although individuals do not participate in as many different communities as they have different selves, they do tend to participate in communities where a particular facet of our self is important to them, (Goffman, 1959; & James in Wozniak, 1999).

Social network sites have made it possible for communities to form around both online and offline relationships in effect enabling individuals to “personalize their own communities” (Wellman, et al., 2002). Instead of geography or setting, communities may best be defined by their meaning to the individual (Cohen, 2008). Permeable boundaries make it possible for members of one community to connect with members of other communities (boyd & Ellison, 2008) creating a second paradox: If our relationships to and within these communities are visible
to everyone in our network, what impact does this have on how we behave and interact? What if the values and norms of one community conflict with the values and norms of another?

**Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of the study was to provide insight into how a CoP functions when community members are connected through a SNS. It will explore how a group of individuals, who share a common passion for endurance sports, present themselves to other group members using the SNS, Twitter, Facebook, DailyMile, blogs and podcasts. It will also explore the participation patterns of the group members to see if the characteristics of a CoP are present.

Researchers have used two primary definitions when studying online communities (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). The first definition consists of affective measures, such as feelings of camaraderie, empathy, and displaying supportive behaviors toward one another (Hiltz 1985; & Rhiengold, 1993). Recently, the definition has adjusted to include the purpose bringing individuals together, the software used to interact with one another, and the norms and rules that guide member behavior (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). This study explored how individuals in the group displayed these measures as they explored a single facet of the self in an unbounded, networked environment. This study focused on the norms that guided behavior, the daily practices that would indicate the group is a CoP, and the markers of credibility that served as a representation of membership and credibility within the group. The study also focused on the patterns of participation and membership in the group, the means by which members choose to share information, interact with and support one another and the types of ways they expressed themselves. Group membership was also explored by observing the persistence of presence exhibited by members.

This study was a multi-sited, or connective, ethnography (Hine 2000; Wilson 2006), integrating traditional and virtual ethnographic methods to better understand how a community of athletes constructs their social world in combined online spaces. Hine (2000), Markham (1998), Miller and Slater (2000), Mann and Stewart (2002, 2003), and Kendall (1999) have emphasized the importance of an ethnographic approach to Internet research” (as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 308). “The integration of ethnographic methods, both traditional (offline and face-to-face) and virtual, can be helpful in developing rich and comprehensive understandings between online and offline cultural life” (Wilson, 2008, p. 309).
Research Questions

The questions this study is designed to explore are:

1. What are the norms, practices, and markers of the endurance athlete community?
2. What patterns of participation or membership do community members display?

Importance Of The Study

This study is significant because it explored the social web as an embedded part of everyday life. It examined how community members shared information and interacted with each other as part of a series of overlapping social networks. It examined the norms that guided behavior in this environment by looking at what study participants did to see if any guiding principles could be gleaned from their actions. It examined the kinds of practices members used as being part of the community as well as what artifacts were displayed to signify membership status. The study is also important in that it explored the ways in which community members interacted with each other in this blended and fragmented environment. As boyd and Ellison (2008) state, “Social Networking Sites constitute and important research context for scholars investigating processes of impression management, self-presentation, and friendship performance” (p. 219).

The time for thinking of the Web as a separate and distinct plane of existence has passed and it is now time to consider the Web for what it has become, an ordinary part of the way people live their lives. Because, it is in the routine nature of the way we cross online-offline boundaries where the significance of the Web lies and where researchers should focus their efforts. According to Wellman and Haythornthewaite (2002):

It is the boringness and routineness that makes the Internet important because this means that it is being pervasively incorporated into people’s lives. It is time now for more differentiated analysis of the Internet that take into account how it has increasingly become embedded into everyday life. (p. 7)
Scope Of The Study

This study was a connective ethnography that combined the lived experience of participants in both online and offline settings. This study did not treat these settings as separate but instead viewed them as being the normal process of interaction among members. In other words, no distinction was made between online and offline life. Rather, the technology was subsumed, or integrated, as a natural part of how participants went about their lives. In writing about the web, Hine (2000) states the net "does not transcend traditional notions of time and space; rather it produces multiple orderings of time and space which cross the online/offline boundary" (p. 285). This study adds to this understanding following a community of endurance athletes over a three-month period (January 16-April 13, 2012) in an attempt to gain insight into how community members presented themselves to one another and how they interacted as a community. The purpose of the study was to provide insight into how individuals relate to one another using social networking sites.

About The Community

The community that was studied was a community of endurance athletes—marathoners, ultra marathoners, and triathletes. I am a member of this community. Almost all of the interaction between community members occurs online. I am a long-standing member of this community and the study was conducted with the full knowledge and cooperation of the participants. None of us are professional athletes. We hold full-time jobs ranging from homemakers to people who own their own business. Endurance sports are our avocation. We make an ideal community to study the impact the social web is having on our notions of identity and community because 1) our avocation demands a large amount of commitment and time 2) this creates a tension between our avocation and our professional and personal lives, and 3) this tension is played out in large part over the social web.
Definition Of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. Unless otherwise noted, the researcher developed definitions.

Blog – a website that acts as an online journal. A blog often contains information designed to educate the reader. It also serves as a forum for the author to share his or her personal experiences.

Community – a group of individuals who come together based on common interests, beliefs, or values. Members share a common culture that they perpetuate through the development of norms and practices that are meant to create the desired attitude and behaviors required for membership.

Culture - A historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicates, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Geertz, 1973).

Dailymile - a web-based application designed for endurance athletes such as marathon runners, ultramathoners, and triathletes. It is a place where athletes post their workout data, notes, photos, and videos for others to see and comment on.

Facebook – a web-based social networking site where people construct a network of friends with whom they share information, photos, and videos.

Folkways - the conventions that guide behavior; they the rules of etiquette for how to interact with each other.

Identity – for the purposes of this study the term identity refers strictly to the distinguishing characteristics of the individual as he or she presents himself or herself. It does not venture into the psychological understanding and construction

Laws – the formal rules of behavior.

Markers - the symbols that represent membership of the community. They indicate both credibility and status.

Mores - the moral rules of the community. They serve to delineate the social lines that should not be crossed.

Norms – the unspoken rules of behavior that guide participation in the community. There are four types of norms: folkways, mores, taboo, and laws.

Patterns of Membership – the persistence of presence in the community.
Patterns of Participation - the ways in which community members interact. Patterns are the means by which members choose to share information, interact with and support one another. Patterns refer to both the means and the Type of interaction of each individual.

Practices - the things we do on a daily basis to interact as a community.

Presentation of Self – the manner in which an individual attempts to control or manage the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner. (Goffman, 1959)

Podcast – A multimedia presentation used much like a blog a podcast is designed to educate the audience as well as serve as a forum for the author to share his or her personal experiences.

Social Network - places on the Web that enable individuals to interact with one another via text, images, and multimedia.

Social Networking - The process an individual uses to navigate the social web.

Social Web - a collection of social networking sites used by an individual to connect with his or her broader social group.

Taboos - actions that are forbidden by the community.

Twitter - a web-based social networking site where people can share information in short bursts, limited to 140 characters.
Chapter 2

Review of the Selected Literature

Rationale For The Selected Literature

Early studies involving individuals and groups on the web treated the web as if it were a separate plane of existence. This first phase of research relied on experimental methods to understand the potential of the web as a communication vehicle (Hine, 2005). However, the coming of the second-generation of the web made it apparent to researchers that if they were to truly understand what was happening in online communities, they needed to embed these communities into the cultural context of the participants, more comprehensive, qualitative methods were called for (Bruckman, 2002; Hine, 2000; Marcus, 1995; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Ridings & Geffen, 2004).

Creswell (2009) defined qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). This kind of research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study phenomenon in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Ethnography is a type of qualitative research inquiry dealing with a scientific description of a specific culture or society. Ethnographic research holds great potential for Internet research, and in particular social web research, because its main purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of people and their culture through the ethnographer immersing him or herself within the social and cultural context of the phenomenon being studied. This kind of research involves the researcher acting as both a participant and observer in a given community over an extended period of time. During this time the researcher participates, either overtly or covertly, in the day-to-day life of the community all the while collecting data through any available means in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study (Bruce & Bishop 2008; Hine, 2000; Leander, 2008; Walker 2010; Young, 2008). This kind of rich understanding has the potential for the researcher to uncover the “enduring natural process” from which the phenomena emerge.
(Geertz, 1973, p. 44). Researchers such as Hine (2000), Walker (2010) and Wilson (2006) have all emphasized the importance of the ethnographic research approach to Internet research.

While there is growing recognition of the important role ethnographic research can play in building our understanding of how the social web impacts our notions of identity and community, the relative newness of this phenomena means there is not a lot of research on which to build. Research is just beginning to delve into the melding of online-offline interactions and the meaning that underlies them. These new kinds of interactions take place using social networking technologies where individual networks overlap. Each individual is the center of multiple networks no longer separated by place, either physical or virtual. Very often, an individual communicates with friends in the same places he or she also communicates with family and co-workers, with the added variable that every piece of information shared is visible to everyone, our intended as well as non-intended recipients.

The following sections review the literature as it is related to the research questions of this study. Specifically, literature is reviewed as it pertains to presentation of self, communities of practice, the characteristics of the study participants, and the field of study.

**Review Of The Related Literature On SNS And Presentation Of Self**

For the purposes of this study, the construct *presentation of self* refers to Goffman’s (1959) notion of presentation of the self where the individual attempts to control or manage the impression that others might make of him through a performance. According to Goffman, performance is what an individual does in front of a given audience. It contains both conscious and unconscious acts and is dependent upon the situation at hand and the people witnessing it. In *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman uses the analogy of the theatre to dissect the interactions that occur in social situations. Goffman views life as a series of performances where each performance is dependent upon the individual putting on the appropriate persona, or mask, the situation requires.

For any given performance the individual must put on the appropriate front. “Front” Goffman says, is “that part of the…performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (p.22). Included with the front is the setting or place where the performance takes place. For Goffman, the setting is a geographically fixed place. It is the stage where the performance takes place and the individual is
expected to put on the appropriate performance as soon as he/she walks out onto the stage and he/she must maintain this front until they walk off the stage. It is backstage where the individual is free to let down their front and let other aspects of their persona show (Goffman, 1959).

It is important for the individual to maintain the proper appearance and manner the performance requires. Ones appearance is meant to be a physical display of ones social status or state of being at the moment. It is in large part the costume you wear for a given performance. It is a visual queue for the audience as to what to expect regarding the performance. Manner is the way one goes about putting on a performance. It is the tone and demeanor one carries for the performance and serves as both a verbal (tone) and nonverbal (demeanor) queue for the audience as to what role they might be expected to play during the performance (Goffman, 1959).

For the purposes of this study, each social network was considered its own stage with a unique setting and requiring the individual to put on a certain front, including the proper appearance and demeanor for the purpose of putting on a performance that met the expectations of the audience. As noted in Chapter one, the overlapping of social networks creates for us a paradox of presentation where at any given time we are performing on several different stages with each stage placing demands on the individual as to the type of performance. Several studies have explored this paradox and will be described below.

Wilson (2002, 2006) kept this tension in mind when conducting his studies of youth culture’s resistance to authority in Canada. In both studies (one on rave subculture and one on social activist groups), Wilson was concerned with the relationship between the online-offline flow of information and subsequently culture. Wilson makes three assumptions based upon his research that will apply to this study. First, any distinction between online and offline is arbitrary and most people view these interactions as interconnected. Second, researchers need to consider the increasingly global character of culture. Finally, the identified link between the affordances of the Internet and the rise of social movements.

Chambers (2012) explored the paradox of multiple front stages (settings) in his analysis of the evolution of the rock star Alice Cooper. Originally, Alice Cooper was the stage persona of the singer Vince Furnier. Furnier would use Alice as his front when performing and would go back to being himself after the show. Over time the personae of Alice came to be the expectation of Furnier whenever he was in public. Furnier legally changed his name to Alice Cooper. As Furnier pursued other opportunities besides music—he owns a BBQ restaurant in Phoenix where he lives and he also has a syndicated radio show—he did so as Alice Cooper because that was how he is known. But Furnier could not pursue these other ventures using the full front of his
wild stage personae where he is over-the-top theatrical. Furnier, now known as Alice, had to pursue these other ventures by showing the audience a different side of the Alice Cooper persona. The audience bought into these other sides of Alice’s persona and so now, Chambers asserts, Alice must maintain multiple fronts—the musician, the disc jockey, and the restaurateur.

Chamber’s explanation of the use of multiple fronts is pertinent to this study. Chambers cites Goffman’s (1959) notion that we have multiple fronts, dependent on the circumstance—the front-stage, which is the personae we put on for the public, the back-stage, where we relax because we are no longer performing in front of an audience. The back-stage is where we a more relaxed version of ourselves. There only those closest to us are present (Goffman, 1959, Chamber, 2012). In his study, Chambers describes how the back stage and off stage versions of Alice Cooper have ostensibly morphed into additional front stage personalities. Chamber’s argues that by inviting his public audience into his back-stage life Alice created a front-stage region with a “back-stage style” (p.15).

In an article on a sociological understanding of Twitter, Murthy (2012) states that the boundaries between our public and private selves must be understood if we are to gain an understanding SNS are having on presentation of self. Murthy states that participation in social networking is about self-presentation. Murthy also states that regular activity on social networking sites becomes a meaningful part of the individual’s identity. In the same manner as Chamber’s (2012) describes the evolution of an additional front-stage persona of Alice Cooper using a backstage style, Murthy notes that users of social networks are bringing “personalized and interpersonal communication into the public domain” (p.4). Users of social networks are using these networks to share aspects of their personality that would normally be reserved for those closest to them in a backstage setting.

In order to understand the impact SNS are having on presentation of self, a researcher must 1) understand the difference between stage fronts and 2) how SNS are morphing these fronts into different kinds of public displays. By doing this the researcher can gain an understanding of the tension SNS may cause individuals, especially when backstage persona takes the position of lead persona. This dynamic plays itself out among a series over overlapping social networks, which serve as a new kind of community.
Review Of The Related Literature On The Social Web And Community

In their analysis of the networked nature of community, Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2010) posit that SNS, rather than destroying communities is instead transforming them into “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity” (p.153). According to Wellman, Boase, and Chen, our understanding of community is shifting from one of geographical constraints, where an individual joined a fixed group, to one of overlapping lapping networks that are held together by the individual sitting at the center of these networks. This shift in how communities form and function is key to understanding the impact of SNS, comprised of overlapping networks, set up with the individual at the center and from which the individual must navigate. Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2010) refer to this as “networked individualism” (p.160) where each individual acts as a “switchboard” between their networks (p.161).

In an article on culture, identity, and curriculum in the age of globalization, McCarthy, et al (2010) argues that culture is taking on a global flair where “practices of identity construction are no longer bound by physical borders” and are patched together from an international array of characteristics (2003, p.451).

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has written extensively on the rise of post-national social formations and the inherent tensions they create between global and local cultures (1994, 2000). Appadurai identifies five ways, or scapes, in which culture is able to move around the world: 1) Ethnoscapes – the flow of people; 2) Technoscapes – the flow of technology; 3) Finanscapes – the flow of capital; 4) Mediascapes – the flow of information, and 5) Ideoscapes – the flow of ideas. For this study the flow of information (mediascapes) and ideas (ideoscapes) are critical for understanding the way individuals navigate their various social networks.

Katz et al (2004) noted a relationship structure similar to what Wellman, Boase, and Chen found in their work applying network theory to small groups. Network theory posits that a social network consists of a set of individuals and the relationships that bind them together. A critical component of their perspective is that most individuals, which they refer to as “actors,” share more than one kind of relationship, which they call “ties” (Katz, et al, p.308).

Radcliffe-Brown saw something similar in his work on social structures. In his presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (1940) he asserts that relationships between individuals are not the result of there being similar interests between them but rather because there is a mutual interest in one another. In other words, it is not
the interest in the topic of the community that bonds people together but rather it is the discovery of a mutual interest in one another that does it. He goes on to say that a common interest will also bond people together. It is important to note that Radcliffe-Brown distinguishes between “similar interests” and “common interests” with a similar interest being the weaker of the two. In Radcliffe-Brown’s interpretation similar interests are more ephemeral and fleeting while common interests are more likely to be part of our core identity and thus personal and permanent. To use the subjects of this study as an example, it is more likely that individuals will come together because of a common belief that endurance sports are a critical piece of our core identity as opposed to someone who may bicycle simply because he enjoys being out in the woods somewhere.

A community is a group of people held together by a common interest in each other because they share one or more interests that make up their core identity. These communities are no longer bound by place but have through the social web morphed into a series of overlapping networks in which each individual rests at the center of his or her own networks. These networks are global in nature as individuals identify and align themselves with those they have the most in common with regardless of geographical proximity.

**Review Of The Related Literature On The subjects Of The Study**

Endurance sports are prolonged athletic activities that take place over an extended distance for an extended period of time. The appeal for the participants is in the mental and physical challenge these sports present. Participants gain a tremendous amount of satisfaction from this—primarily because of the work they put in in order to accomplish something they could not do before. There are many types of endurance sports designed for all kinds of climates. The participants in this study participate in three kinds of endurance sports—the marathon, the ultra marathon, and the triathlon. The marathon is a footrace 26 miles and 385 yards in length. Ultra marathons are considered any distance greater than a marathon. As a general rule they begin at 31 miles 120 yards and go up from there. Triathlons entail three types of activities—running, biking, and swimming. A full triathlon, known as the Ironman, consists of a 2.4-mile swim followed by a 112-mile bike ride, and capped off by running a marathon. For the purposes of this study, particular focus is placed on the marathon because that is the primary sport for the majority of the study participants.
Marathons are seasonal events. The most popular time of year for marathons to be held is the fall through the beginning of winter, October through December. Thirty-two percent of marathons in any given year are held during this time. (2011 USA Marathon Statistics and Report). October is the most popular month, accounting for eighteen percent of all marathons, and many runners use an October race to try and qualify for the Boston Marathon, considered by runners to be the Super Bowl of marathons. Begun in 1896 the Boston Marathon is the oldest contested marathon and is traditionally run on the third Monday in April, Patriot’s Day (BAA.org). Winter and spring are also popular times for marathons because cooler temperatures make for ideal running conditions and participants can put up their best times, known as personal records (PR). Summer, with the intense heat, can be too dangerous. While there are not a lot of fatalities, there is a certain amount of risk to running a marathon. The 2007 Chicago Marathon was cut short because of numerous medical issues related to an unexpected and unseasonably warm and humid October day. Forty-nine people were hospitalized and one person died as a result of the heat. Race promoters stopped the event after 3 ½ hours to avoid further harm (Thigpen, 2008). There were two fatalities at the 2011 Philadelphia Marathon. One man, in his mid-forties died less than a quarter mile from the finish line and a second, a student from the University of Pennsylvania, collapsed and died just after crossing the finish line (Breen, 2011). For many marathon runners, the risk of death is part of the allure of the challenge (Berking & Neckel, 1993; Reischer, 2001).

People who have completed a marathon make up less than one percent of the population. One in a thousand U.S. citizens will run a marathon in their lifetime and less than one in ten thousand Americans will run a second one (Reischer, 2001). According to a report on MarathonGuide.com, men made up 58.9% of all runners in 2011 and woman accounted for 41.1%. Participation by women continues to grow. In 2000, there were 299,00 finishers, 62.5% were men and 37.5% were women. By 2011 there were 55,000 finishers and the percentage of men who finished dropped to 58.9% while the percentage of women finishers rose to 41.1%. The average age for male entries was 40.5 years for men and 37 years for women. The average age of people who completed a marathon is 38.9 years. The largest age groups of finishers are made up men aged 40-44, men aged 35-39, and women aged 25-29. This is how age ranges are broken down on entry forms. The average time it took to complete a marathon in 2011 was 4:28:48. Male finishers took an average of 4:17:36 and women 4:44:19. Compare that to professional marathoner Robert Kiprono Cheruiyot who won the 2011 Boston Marathon with a finishing time of 2:05:52 (2011 USA Marathon Statistics and Report).
The motivation to train for and run a marathon is deeply personal. It is also a very physical undertaking, requiring lots of hours spent on the road and in the gym. And yet it is also a very public endeavor. In her study of how marathon runners construct their identity, Reischer refers to this as a trilectic process ‘…in which body, self-and world all participate in a dynamic process of mutual construction” (2001, p. 32). She finds that the participants in her study felt transformed by their ability to complete a marathon and that by breaking through perceived natural barrier of running 26.2 miles the participants felt equipped to take on the other challenges of life.

While Reischer studied the process of identity construction among marathoners, Berking and Neckel (1993) discuss the tension this creates between the individual and society. They argue that modernization created a disconnect between society and the individual and that certain lifestyles, like marathon running, help to fill this void by supporting “both the individualization strategies of subjectivity and the standardization constraints of the social” (p.65). The marathon, they say, helps fill this void because it requires the participants to have certain requirements desired by society such as “trust in one’s own abilities, belief in the future and reason, and a drive for ruthless self-improvement” (p.69). They also note that for the vast majority of participants the marathon represents a special kind of competition—one against the self rather than against others. This kind of competition takes on a type of religious significance in which the spectators can also participate because of the visible display of achievement through suffering.

In their study of marathon runners who were running for a cause, e.g. to raise money for charity, Jeffery and Butryn (2012) found that a sense of personal growth was second strongest support factor motivating the participants. The social support aspect was the number one motivator while fundraising was third. These two motivational factors are important to this study because like the participants in the Jeffery and Butryn study, participants in this study began running for one of two reasons—health or self-esteem and they found the social support received from the community to be beneficial.

Review Of The Related Literature On The Field Of Study

Researching the flow of culture and identity construction as it moves between online-offline spaces is not without its challenges. Traditionally, ethnographic research is conducted in the field and, by definition, is bounded by a geographical setting, e.g. the researcher travelled to
the group he wished to study and lived among them (Burrell, 2009; Hine, 2000; Marcus, 1995; & Walker, 2010). The field site in which the study was bounded occurred naturally, generally being defined by the physical limitations of the setting. A particular group’s physical reach could only extend so far and was limited by the extent to which they could routinely move about a particular setting (Geertz, 1973). Emerging online spaces such as discussion forums and virtual worlds appeared to belong to “an entirely new category of space” (Burrell, 2009, p. 184). As such, early Internet, or virtual, ethnographies tended to treat the Internet as its own bounded field site keeping a marked distinction between online and offline boundaries (Hine, 2000).

Walker (2010) and Wellman and Haythornwaite (2002) questioned the practice of treating the web as a separate space given the way it was used. People move freely between online and offline environments using one to inform the other making it difficult, and perhaps irrelevant, to differentiate between communication mediated by the Internet and other forms of communication such as talking on the telephone, exchanging letters, or, even, conversing in person.

An emergent approach to solving this problem is a methodology referred to as connective ethnography. Connective Ethnography (Hine 2000; Wilson 2006), also referred to as a mobile or multi-sited ethnography, is a methodology designed to integrate traditional and virtual ethnographic methods to better understand the relationships between online and offline cultural life. In this type of ethnographic study the focus is on “the meaning-making of the work that accompanies the use of information and communication technologies” (Walker, 2010, p. 24). Doing connective ethnographic research consists of following what the individual does in toto as they live their lives routinely moving among online and offline spaces. When conducting connective ethnographic research, ethnographers are required to switch from their traditional understanding of a field site as a place where boundaries are set by geography or are otherwise spatially fixed to a network of connections to something more fluid in nature. As culture is no longer bounded by local situations nor should ethnographic study. Instead ethnographic research should move from conventional research designs to designs that examine “the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus, 2005, p. 96).

Walker (2010) states, “One of the primary rationales for using multi-sited ethnography in digital ethnography is that it can help break down methodologically persuasive, but theoretically problematic dualism between the neat separation of online and offline” (p. 38). Breaking down this distinction is critical if we are to better understand the notion of identity and culture as people and information travel freely in the network between mediated and unmediated environments.
Thus using a connective methodological approach will help deepen our understanding of the phenomenon under study, in this instance a running community as they operate in overlapping worlds. However, while connective ethnography offers a way for researchers to glean insights into how meaning is constructed, it also presents challenges of where the ethnographer should locate himself.

The challenge for the ethnographer is the switch from thinking of the field site as a definitive setting that frames the study from the beginning to something more fluid that is constructed along the way and to do so in a manner that keeps the study “coherent manageable, and defensible” (Walker, 2010, p. 26). Amit (2000) argues that the ethnographer must construct the field site through painstaking attention to detail.

Burrell (2009) and Walker (2010) approached the problem of constructing the field site by viewing the field as a network where some or all individuals are physically decentralized from one another yet still considered themselves to be part of the same community. Both researchers adopted theory frameworks of study by borrowing from Marcus’ (1995) notion of modes of construction where the ethnographer moves from a single site notion of fieldwork to one of following where a particular mode may take you. This approach “develops instead a strategy or design of research that acknowledges macroethical concepts and narratives of the world system but does not rely on them for the contextual architecture framing a set of subjects” (1995, p. 96).

Hine (2000) built upon Marcus’ concept of following the modes stating the field site could be constructed by tracing the connections among the participants. This means the ethnographer’s role while in the field is to follow the movement of objects, texts, and bodies as they move between online and offline spaces (Leander an McKim, 2003).

When doing ethnographic research on web-based interaction, the field site is not something decided upon once and for all at the start of the project, but instead is continuously evolving as decisions about inclusion and exclusion are made throughout the study (Burrell, 2009). “Consequently, the definition of the research setting becomes not a starting point but a primary research question requiring careful and continuous examination by the virtual ethnographer throughout fieldwork” (Rutter & Smith, 2005, p. 85).
Summary

Researchers are just beginning to explore the impact of the social web. However, there is a growing sentiment among social scientists that if we are to truly understand the phenomenon, we must study it in the context of everyday life. The study uses Goffman’s definitions of front, setting, appearance, and manner to breakdown what is happening with each performance. Because in order to understand the impact the social web is having on identity we must 1) understand the difference between our stage fronts and 2) how the social web is morphing them into different kinds of public displays. By doing this we can gain an understanding of the tension the social web is causing among our many different selves, especially as our backstage persona increasingly takes the position of our lead persona.

A community is a group of people held together by a common interest in each other because they share one or more beliefs, interests, or values that make up their core identity. These communities are no longer bound by place but have through the social web morphed into a series of overlapping networks in which each individual rests at the center of his or her own networks. These networks are global in nature as individuals identify and align themselves with those they have the most in common with regardless of geographical proximity. A community of endurance athletes makes an ideal group for study because these athletes tend to be independent and goal driven by nature and are yet willing to share and express them out in the open.

When doing an ethnographic study of the social web the field is not entered into as a fixed place in time but is instead constructed by the ethnographer and the participants as the study unfolds. The ethnographer does this by following the flow of the individuals and the information they create through the various online and offline spaces.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Context For The Study

I made the decision, as the researcher, to use myself as the center node for this study. The rationale for doing this was, I am a long-standing member of the community and, given the time constraints of completing the study, this approach meant more time was available to observe the community from the framework of the research questions. A community of twenty-one endurance athletes participated in the study. This represented a small sample of athletes I am acquainted with on Twitter, Facebook, and DailyMile. I mapped out the community by placing myself in the position of center node (boyd, & Ellison, 2008; Katz, et al, 2004; Wu, 2012). Individuals were invited to be part of the study based on the following criteria: 1) they were an endurance athlete of some kind (marathoner, ultra marathoner, triathlete); 2) they were actively training; 3) they were active on Twitter, DailyMile, and/or Facebook; 4) they were not a professional athlete, e.g. they did not make a living as an endurance athlete; and 5) I felt I had a close relationship with them and they would be more inclined to act naturally over the course of the study.

Research Design: Connective Ethnography

This study was a multi-sited, or connective, integrating traditional and virtual ethnographic methods to better understand how a community of endurance athletes constructs their social world in combined online spaces ethnography (Burrell, 2009; Hine 2000; Marcus, 1995; Walker, 2010; & Wilson 2006). The community was comprised of athletes from several countries: Canada, England, The Netherlands, Scotland, and the United States. Two of the participants experienced online and offline interaction with each other. All other interactions took place online. No participant met everyone in the network in person.

The field site as method approach was employed for the study (Burrell, 2009; Marcus, 1995; & Walker, 2010). This method allowed me, as the researcher, to establish “some form of
literal, physical presence by following the logic of association” among these sites (Marcus, 1995, p.190). The field site was a network composed of fixed and moving parts including people, physical places, such as hometowns or race locations, and virtual places, such as Twitter and Facebook, blogs and podcasts, and, the training site, DailyMile. The networked approach to fieldwork allowed the opportunity to follow things wherever they led thus enabling me to develop an understanding of the social dynamics involved within the community by teasing them out from the other kinds of information flow going on. Burrell (2009) defines this process as foregrounding.

This study used the steps for field site construction proposed by Burrell (2009):

*Seek entry points rather than sites.* This step requires the researcher to make a strategic decision as to what position to take within the network. In my study Twitter served as the starting point since it was the locus of communication for the community.

*Consider multiple types of networks.* Marcus’s multi-sited research design calls for researchers to follow whatever mode may prove valuable for mapping out the relationships between the members of the community, their connection to the topic, their connection to the objects they create and consume for each other, and their relationship to space, both online and offline.

*Follow, but also intercept.* In her study of city-specific discussion forums in Philadelphia, Walker (2010) used Burrell’s (2009) notion of an intercept point by identifying the discussion forum as the place where the majority of activity, both online and offline, moved through. Twitter served that purpose for this study.

*Attend to what is indexed in interviews.* Burrell advises the researcher to pay close attention to how community members reference notions of space and place could offer leads to further avenues of exploration.

*Incorporate uninhabitable spaces.* These are places that are imagined, or constructed by the participants, and exist only in their mind.
Know when and where to stop. Burrell indicates the researcher will know when to stop when themes become repeated or the mode being followed moves beyond the topic of interest.

This study focused on the impact SNS had on the way a community of endurance athletes presented themselves and interacted with one another. The community operated in the open. Community members interacted with each other on the same social networking sites where they communicated with non-athletes (family, friends, and coworkers).

**Qualitative Methods Employed**

*Participatory Research/Observation.* Since I am a long-standing member of the community, it was logical that I be an overt part of the study. I continued in my role as a community member, actively participating in conversations and added the role of observer where I recorded and analyzed the activities of the community. The rationale behind this approach is for the researcher to “obtain data about behavior through direct contact with the participants (Kluckhorn, 1940). This kind of research enables the ethnographer to gain a rich understanding of the “enduring natural process” from which the phenomena emerge (Geertz, 1973, p. 44).

*Multi-Modal Documentation.* Nineteen of the community members had a Twitter profile, seventeen had a Facebook profile, and eighteen had a profile on DailyMile. Seventeen community members had a blog and four had a podcast. Artifacts from these spaces were collected including Tweets, status updates, workout posts, blog posts, and podcast recordings. Often times these artifacts contained text and supporting media (images and movies). As many pertinent artifacts as possible were collected over the period of study.

*Field Noting.* Notes were kept to document the researcher’s understanding of events. These included using notes to scaffold the movement of people, themes, and objects across multiple websites.

*Direct Contact.* There were times when it was necessary for me to communicate directly with the study participants through email, Instant Messenger, or Twitter direct messages. This was done to help clarify my understanding of a situation or to seek input from a study participant.
Ethical Considerations

Since I am a long-standing member of the community, the ethical decision was made that I be an overt part of the study. I expressed my intentions with the community and explained my dual role as a continuing member of the community as well as an active researcher observing the community. In accordance with the parameters set by the Office of Research Protections, all study participants were sent a detailed email explaining my intentions. Participants were asked to send back an email reply with their decision. All twenty-one members of the community contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected over part of the 2012 spring season. Generally, endurance athletes have two seasons when events are prevalent: The fall season, which runs from September through December, and the spring season, which runs from March to May (MarathonGuide.com). This study covered a three-month period (January 16-April 13, 2012) during the spring season.

The data collection process was emergent and was dictated by what was happening within the community. Twitter served as both the entry and intercept point for the study, because it was the nexus, or common meeting ground, for the community. A network model of the field site was constructed, moving, or in flow, and following the activity of the participants as they moved among the various environments collecting text and multi-media objects as well as other artifacts along the way.

The data collection process occurred in three phases. Phase 1 was an open-ended phase exploring what was happening at a given moment in order to gain a general sense of what it going on in the community. Phase 2 was a period of focused exploration where attention was given to a specific mode (person, activity, or object) of interest. Phase 3 was a process check with community members (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) either by email, Instant Messenger, or Twitter Direct Message. If a participant posted something on Twitter and I wasn’t sure of the meaning, I would ask them publicly for clarification if the topic seemed benign. If, however, I had the impression the subject might be sensitive, I would send that person a Direct Message, asking if
we could discuss it further privately. In all instances, participants were willing to answer my questions. For example, one member of the study uses a pseudonym throughout the Web except on Facebook where he uses his real name (Facebook policy). In an email exchange, I asked him about this, and he replied he does not mind sharing his name within personal correspondence; however he does not want to do that with the general public. He is on Facebook because that is where his family has accounts. He is comfortable posting there using his real name because he can use the privacy settings to set access to his information. In only three instances throughout the study was a private process check used. These phases overlapped as the various modes of inquiry moves through the process.

**Data Sources**

*Blog sites.* A blog is a website that acts as an online journal. A blog often contains information designed to educate the reader. It also serves as a forum for the author to share his or her personal experiences.

*DailyMile.* A web-based application designed for endurance athletes such as marathon runners, ultramarathoners, and triathletes. It is a place where athletes post their workout data, notes, photos, and videos for others to see and comment on.

*Facebook.* Facebook is a web-based SNS where people construct a network of friends with whom they share information, photos, and videos.

*Podcasts.* A multimedia presentation used much like a blog a podcast is designed to educate the audience as well as serve as a forum for the author to share his or her personal experiences.

*Twitter.* A web-based social networking site where people can share information in short bursts, limited to 140 characters.

The primary method of data collection was via the Grab application for Mac, screen-capturing software that comes standard with a MacBook that enables the capturing of full or partial images of the computer screen and save them in various formats. Screen captures were made and pasted into a Microsoft Word document where they were combined with field notes. Podcasts were not transcribed; instead they were listened to and themes from the discussion
pulled out and added to the document. Captured data was originally pieced together in chronological order. Data were later separated into different documents for coding and analysis.

**Data Analysis And Triangulation**

This study used the Web Sphere Analysis approach devised by Schneider & Foote (2005). Instead of focusing on web sites, a web sphere analysis contextualizes the web as:

A set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple web sites deemed relevant or related to a central event, concept, or theme, and often connected by hyperlinks. The boundaries of a web sphere are delimited by a shared topical orientation and a temporal framework (Schneider & Foote, 2005, p. 158).

The process of web sphere analysis for this study included: 1) Identifying, capturing, and archiving web-based materials in context and related to the theme of the study. 2) Coding, or annotating the captured data into units of analysis. 3) Participatory observation, private email and message exchanges, and field notes were used to compliment the web-based data elements.

The complete document (Tweets, blog posts, workout posts, status updates and field notes) was used to ascertain what themes emerged from the data. Key words and phrases were identified and a series of documents based on themes was created using a copy and paste method. From these documents a final document consisting of the themes and the examples from the data that best illustrated them was created and used to create Chapter four.

Below is an example from the final document. It contains the name of the person in the study [a pseudonym was used], what was being said the field notes, including the page number where the artifact could be found:

“Phile (p199) tweets “Super fascinating visit with [name of physician removed] at [name of clinic removed]. Verdicts? Running efficiency better than 2010. Must lengthen hip extensors, gastroc soleus. And a follow-up tweet, “Arrived! Time to re-tune and fine-tune my orthotics
with a session at [name of clinic removed] gait lab. My second time here ☺ “with a link to a photo.

“(p198) “Screen shot of my weight distribution and flow while running wearing shoes with orthotics. Clinic visit today!” With a pic showing three images of her foot. Someone not in the study replies, “Awesome!” To which Phile replies, “it was such a cool visit. What I liked was seeing how my work “has” led to improvement. External validation felt good 😊”

This example was coded “dealing with injuries/disabilities” because the reason for her attending the clinic was “to re-tune and fine-tune my orthotics” and she included in her series of Tweets a screen shot of her weight distribution and flow while running wearing shoes with orthotics. She also included three images of her foot.

This example was also coded “Hardcore” because Phile mentioned her running efficiency, “Running efficiency better than 2010” and what she must improve upon, “Must lengthen hip extensors, gastroc soleus.” The statement “Screen shot of my weight distribution and flow while running wearing shoes with orthotics” was also used as validation for coding this exchange as “Hardcore” because it had to do with her training as well. Finally, the example was also coded “Running and mind” because Phile mentioned how the visit made her feel, “What I liked was seeing how my work “has” led to improvement. External validation felt good 😊”

Biographies were written for the study participants who were most active during the data collection phase. The goal was to gain a more complete picture of the study participants from their profile pages across the SNS used in the study (Twitter, Facebook, DailyMile, and a blog if they had one). These were also included as part of the field notes. Below is an example of the biography put together for Eunike:

“Eunike is a marathoner living in [town name removed], Scotland. She is married and has two daughters. Her husband [name removed] is in the RAF. They’ve been living in [name removed] since 2004. I’ve known Eunike for at least 5(?) years. I met her via the podcast, [name removed], I used to do with a co-worker & running partner (former). Eunike discovered the podcast and followed me on Twitter. I followed back.
Over time we friended each other on Facebook. We are also friends on dailymile. Eunike has 13 friends there.

“Eunike Twitter bio, “aka Northern Nutter. Wannabe writer and RAF WAG who runs marathons. Been known to cycle and swim. Love my family, friends, dog, life.” Eunike has over 5,500 tweets. She follows 355 others and is followed by 254.

“Eunike was a serious marathoner for quite a spell. She was constantly in training. I recall a YouTube video of her doing chin-ups. Something happened along the way (fatigue? Body and/or mind breakdown) and Eunike found herself along the side of the road, sitting on a curb a crying. This happened during a run (not sure if it was a training run or an event. Either way she completely stopped training for a long spell. Sometime last year (I need to verify the timeframe) she began running again just for pleasure, not putting any pressure on herself. She said that it was reading my Philadelphia Marathon training reports on my blog that inspired her to start training again with an eye toward an event (need to read her comment for specifics). For the new year, 2012, one of her resolutions was to run everyday of the year. After each run she posts a short description of the run on Facebook where she has 113 friends. On February 5th I went to her Facebook wall to capture some of her written recordings. Eunike does her posting via Echofon.”
The table below lists the codes used in the final document used to write Chapter four and two examples that illustrate the code theme.

### Table 3-1 Coding Themes With Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Example #1</th>
<th>Example #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Running and Life</strong></td>
<td>Timo tweets “Looking forward to a long workout and a quiet night at home to catch up. Ahhh.”</td>
<td>Leonidas tweets “Baby temp of 103+. No show tonight. The wee one needs snuggle time. :9 Leonidas does a weekly webcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hardcore</strong></td>
<td>Aphrodisios’ twitter icon is of him running at the track.</td>
<td>Eunike on Facebook is up to 95 straight days of running. She talks about getting her “first black toenail of the year” “So that’s three toes out of action, only 7 to go, or 6 if I count my bunion on the injured list. Toes are overrated anyway. Now where’s my gaffa tape – that’ll sort them! Day 95 #runstreak – I’m loving it 😊)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship with Food</strong></td>
<td>Cleopatra tweets about riding the trainer so she can drink wine that night</td>
<td>Phile talks about the dichotomy between enjoying food and eating to be lean for sport. In 4 tweets over 5 minutes: “I choose eating healthy, eating in moderation, being aware – it’s not mutually exclusive from eating to be lean, but it saves my sanity.” “When I choose to focus on weight loss for sport and being lean, it messes with my joy of life. I lose perspective on what’s important to me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Personally, when it comes to eating & enjoying both life & sport, or deliberately eating for calorie deficit, I know what makes me happier.”

“A pound a week = 500 cal day deficit!!” RT someone who posted about how losing weight to quickly can affect athletic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Injuries/Disabilities</th>
<th>Sophia tweets “Ugh. My plantar fasciitis is acting up again. Time for stretching, rolling, ice and Naproxen. #running #fb”</th>
<th>Zenon tweets “Pain from car accident too much! Half Mary was a total bust! #soangry”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offering Inspiration</td>
<td>Alexis posts an inspirational quote on twitter with a link to its source his dailymile page., where two people liked it and one person made several comments.</td>
<td>Phaedrus writes on his blog about his “Fascination with the ability of the human mind to take us places we never thought possible…” and writes about the role sports and fitness can play in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Aphrodisios tweets “I’m thinking that I would like to be a pacers at next year’s @CHKnoxMarathon. I think that would be cool. ☺”</td>
<td>Cleopatra tweets about hiking up in the hills with her husband and the dogs. Alexis reminds her to check for tics. Cleopatra replies, “Oh good point, we have tons up here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion (products and self)</td>
<td>Syntyche tweets “B/c Kinvara2s rock my worlds”@saucony Tweet why you’re psyched for @saucony #Kinvara3 and you’ll be entered to win it” with a link to a photo of the shoes</td>
<td>Herakleios tweets “Another great podcast from @Alexis number 216 of the run run live podcast.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Running and Mind      | Giane tweets “sometimes having some time alone helps me sort stuff out…and then | Demetria tweets “Ran 4.43 miles in 57 mins. Sometimes it takes a miserable, soul
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan For Study Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The outcome of the study was an ethnographic narrative of a community of endurance athletes over part of the spring event season. It is believed this narrative will help to inform the emerging field of connective ethnography by exploring the impact of the new communication vehicles made possible by the social web that may alter how we choose to interact with each other. “Researchers may find themselves not only studying but participating in the development of new and emergent methods of constructing identity, community, and interaction” (Rutter & Smith, 2005, p. 91)

“We think of society and technology as one heterogeneous collective, composed of people together with technology, machines, and things. It is the interaction among these heterogeneous objects which constitute society and these interrelationships are conceived as networks of human and non-human actors, each of which is itself a network of heterogeneous things” (Walker 2010, p. 29). It is hoped that this ethnographic study and subsequent narrative |
can contribute to our understanding of how a CoP, endurance athletes, sustains itself through the use of SNS.
Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected over the period of the study, January 16-April 13, 2012. The data collected included Twitter updates, blog posts, Facebook status updates, Dailymile updates, and podcasts. Analysis of the data was framed by the two research questions. (1) What are the norms, practices, and markers of running the community? (2) What patterns of participation or membership are presented in the community? The outcome is a thick description of how a community of endurance athletes interact using social network sites. The chapter is broken out by the sections that framed the topic including response rate—or the total count regarding the kinds of data collected, the demographic information of the pilot participants, a description of the field of study, and the findings.

Data Collection And Response Rate

Data were collected over the three-month period from January 16 to April 13, 2012. This period represents the heart of the spring marathon season where training begins in January and for events that take place beginning late March in warmer climates and run through the end of June.

The primary method of data collection was via the Grab application for Mac, a screen capturing software that comes standard with a MacBook that enables you to capture full or partial images of your computer screen and save them in various formats. For this study, screen captures were made and pasted into a Microsoft Word document where they were combined with the field notes. Using this method, 818 tweets, 65 blog posts, 5 podcasts, 54 Facebook updates, and 20 Dailymile updates were collected. Information was gleaned out in the open, except on one occasion when Twitter direct messaging was used, one occasion when Instant Messenger was used, and two occasions when email was used.
Demographic Data

Twenty-one members of the endurance athlete community agreed to participate in the study. Participants were spread out over six time zones, based on Greenwich Mean Time. The majority of participants (15) were from the United States. Four participants were from Canada. Two participants were from the United Kingdom, one in London and one in Scotland, and one participant was from the Netherlands. Eleven women and ten men participated. Participants were given pseudonyms based on Ancient Greek names from a random name generator (http://www.behindthename.com/random/) to keep their identities from being revealed. The table below lists the participants by pseudonym and geographical location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Geographical Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androcles</td>
<td>Vastavia Hills, AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodisios</td>
<td>Knoxville, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspasia</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthi</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthi B</td>
<td>Rodney, MI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>Kelowna, BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetria</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunike</td>
<td>Leuchers, Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giane</td>
<td>Waterloo, Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herakleios</td>
<td>Mattapoisett, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Overland Park, KA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaedrus</td>
<td>Hendersonville, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phile</td>
<td>London, England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Vancouver, British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntyche</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodosios</td>
<td>Waterloo, Ontario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the time of the study, nineteen participants had twitter accounts. Timoteus and Chrysanthe B. did not. Seventeen participants had Facebook accounts, Theodosios, Herakleios, Demetria, and Syntyche did not. Eighteen participants had accounts on Dailymile, Chrysanthe, Androcles, and Herakleios did not. And thirteen participants had accounts on all three social web services. A review of the followers and friends lists of the study participants suggests that they used the social web not to connect with people they know in the physical world as suggested by boyd and Ellison (2008), but rather participants used the social web to find and interact with those with whom they have a common interest (Gunawardena, et al, 2009, Haythornthwaite, 2002, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, Subrahmanyam, et al, 2008). The table below lists the participant’s presence on the selected social media sites for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>DailyMile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androcles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodisios</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspasia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe B</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetria</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunike</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giane</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herakleios</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaedrus</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phile</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntyche</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodosios</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timo</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timoteus</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twitter served as the main intercept point for the study because that is where the majority of interaction took place. Only Timoteus and Chrysanthe B. did not have Twitter accounts. Twitter was the point of first contact for the participants—it was the space they would go to see what others were posting, and it was also the primary space participants would use to post their thoughts to others.

The average number of common followers for participants in the study was 3.4. Five participants had no common followers besides me, the researcher. They were Chrysanthe, Chrysanthe B., Androcles, Timoteus, Sophia. Six had one common follower (Herakleios, Demetria, Giane, Aspasia, Phaedrus, Leon). Two had three common followers (Syntyche, Cleopatra). Two had four common followers (Phile, Eunike). Two had five common followers (Alexis, Zenon). One had eight common followers (Leonidas). One had nine common followers (Theodosius). One had ten common followers (Aphrodisios). And one had thirteen common followers (Timo).

The average number of tweets for the participants at the time of the study was 19,275. Six participants had more tweets than the average (Sophia, Syntyche, Alexis, Phile, Giane, Cleopatra) and of those with twitter accounts, fourteen participants had below the average number of tweets. Cleopatra had the most tweets with 95,670 and of the nineteen participants with Twitter accounts Chrysanthe had the least with 1,707.
The following table lists the participants ranked in order by the number of tweets they created.

**Table 4 - 3 Participants Ranked By Number Of Tweets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tweets</th>
<th>Following</th>
<th>Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>95,670</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>3,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giane</td>
<td>73,155</td>
<td>4,048</td>
<td>5,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phile</td>
<td>52,960</td>
<td>3,723</td>
<td>3,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>41,556</td>
<td>12,600</td>
<td>11,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntyche</td>
<td>32,322</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>2,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>24,749</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>1,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas</td>
<td>19,152</td>
<td>1,855</td>
<td>2,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetria</td>
<td>15,100</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodosios</td>
<td>14,080</td>
<td>2,275</td>
<td>3,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herakleios</td>
<td>12,085</td>
<td>1,709</td>
<td>1,738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timo</td>
<td>7,983</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>7,372</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunike</td>
<td>5,533</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaedrus</td>
<td>4,938</td>
<td>1,937</td>
<td>2,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodisios</td>
<td>4,284</td>
<td>1,909</td>
<td>1,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenon</td>
<td>4,216</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspasia</td>
<td>3,768</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androcles</td>
<td>3,358</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe</td>
<td>1,707</td>
<td>2,001</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timoteus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average participants followed 1,967 other individuals on Twitter. Eight followed more than the average (Phaedrus, Syntyche, Leonidas, Cleopatra, Theodosius, Phile, Giane,
Alexis). Alexis was following the most people, 12,600 followed by Giane who followed 4,048 others. Of those with titter accounts Androcles is following the least 271.

Participants averaged 1,833 followers on Twitter—people who were following them. Nine had more than the average (Leonidas, Aphrodisios, Phaedrus, Chrysanthe, Cleopatra, Theodosius, Phile, Giane, Alexis). Alexis has the most followers with 11,553. The next highest is Giane with 5,507 followers. Of those with Twitter accounts Androcles has the least number of followers 107.

Of the study participants Fourteen had blogs. Only Chrysanth, Zenon, Timoteus, Timo, Chrysanthe & Demetria did not. Four had podcasts—Giane, Alexis, Leonidas, & Cleopatra. These four also had blogs and accounts on all three social networking sites used in this study.

### Table 4 - 4 Participants With A Blog And / Or Podcast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Podcast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androcles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodisios</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspasia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthe B</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleopatra</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetria</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunike</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giane</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herakleios</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaedrus</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phile</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Field Of Study

The field site for this study was comprised of a collection of websites through which the study participants moved through and interacted with each other. These sites were Twitter, Facebook, DailyMile, the participant’s personal blogs and podcasts, and sites referenced by the participants. These reference sites could be sites related to endurance sports, blog sites of other endurance athletes not in the study, websites of companies or professional organizations related to endurance sites, news sites, or general interest sites, defined here as sites not primarily concerned with endurance sports.

The field site is best envisioned as a Weberian “web of significance” spun by the study participants. The philosopher Max Weber said, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance, which he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1973). And for this study the websites mentioned above serve as that web because it is within these sites that the community functions. It is also the place where the participants play out the identity they constructed.

Twitter

Twitter served as both the point of entry for participation in the community as well as the primary site for social interaction. Twitter acted as the community Main Street where interaction began and ultimately circled back to.

Introduced to the public in July 2006, Twitter is a web-based social networking site where people can share information in short bursts, limited to 140 characters. The character limitation is based on the 160 short-messaging system used to send text messages with a mobile phone. The founders of Twitter held aside twenty characters as placeholders for individual names. People can post to twitter from virtually anywhere in the world using a device that has an Internet
connection, a computer, laptop, smart phone, or tablet. Mostly, people post status updates, letting their followers know what they are doing or what is on their mind at a given moment. An individual post is called a tweet. People can post text messages, images, videos, and hyperlinks. More than 200 million individuals are active on Twitter on a monthly basis (Fiegerman, 2012).

Social networks are formed when individuals follow each other on Twitter. An individual can choose to follow another and the tweets of that person will appear on the individual’s timeline. If this person follows the other back, that person’s tweets will appear on their timeline. People make connections and build their social network by scrolling through the lists of followers on the sites of others and following people they find interesting (boyd and Heer, 2006).

People also find people to follow through other means, such as searching for running podcasts on iTunes. For example, Phile followed me because she heard me through a podcast I used to do with my running partner. I found Phile interesting and followed her back. A friend of hers, who lives in Scotland, saw a twitter conversation Phile and I was having, liked what I was saying, and followed me. I followed her back and over time we became close friends.

Facebook

Launched in 2004, Facebook, like Twitter, is a social networking site. Facebook was the first site of its kind to require an individual to use his or her real name. Members create a profile where they share biographical information (Hirschorn, 2007). Most community members have both a Twitter and Facebook account however they may use them differently. Unlike Twitter, where accounts are either open or locked, Facebook allows users to create grades of access determining who can see specific kinds of information. For the running community, Twitter is definitely the more active of the spaces. This could be because that is where we originally connected. Friends write on each other’s wall

Dailymile

Dailymile is a web-based application designed for endurance athletes such as marathon runners, ultramathoners, and triathletes. It is a place where athletes post their workout data, notes, photos, and videos for others to see and comment on. Each member is given a profile page where
biographical information, including a photo, is displayed alongside his or her training history in reverse chronological order. The conversation on dailymile revolves around the sport. There is little, if any, small talk. Small talk is reserved for Twitter and Facebook. Community members will push their workout information posted on dailymile out to their accounts on Twitter and Facebook.

Blogs

Many members of the community also maintain a blog. Blogs are used for sharing reflexive writings, self and product promotion, and information and support. Members use reflexive blogs to reflect upon their experiences and share them out with the community. Reflexive blogs are personal; the individual shares his or her innermost thoughts when it comes to both their athletic experience as well as the rest of their lives. Marathon and triathlon training take up a lot of time, time that is not available for other things be it sleep, work, personal, or family time and, as such, those who keep reflexive blogs cannot help but write about these other facets of life. Reflexive blogs reveal more about an individual over time. An individual starts out by writing in the present and over time they reveal more of the backstory culminating in the event, which turned him or her toward the way of life of an endurance athlete.

Information blogs and support blogs are not reflexive, in that they are not egocentric, focused on the intimate thoughts and experiences of the author; instead, the focus of these kinds of blogs is outward toward the community. Such blogs tend to draw interest from new community members looking for information on how to get started and those runners who are interested in the latest happenings in the sport, particularly when it comes to new gear, nutrition tips and guidelines, and training tips. Product reviews are very common in this type of blog. Generally, the reflexive component of this type of blog is contained on the “About” page where the blog owner will share their story of what drew them into the sport. Oftentimes blogs of this type also contain a podcasting component.

Promotional blogs function in the same manner as information and support blogs in that their focus is outward toward the community and the content tends to be focused on athletic gear, training, and nutrition. This type of blog reviews products and may go as far as to champion them with the hope of gaining some type of sponsorship from the company. Leonidas, a professional opera singer, actually used his blog and podcast as a means of landing a job with an athletic shoe
company. The blog owner will also use this kind of blog to promote their own products, such as books they authored.

Information and support blogs and promotional blogs tend to have complex interfaces with many options in the form of hyperlinks and side panels for the reader to choose from. Reflexive blogs tend to be more simple and personal in design with many just being a single page blog that updates in reverse chronological order.

No matter the blog type, the individual updates, or posts, on his or her schedule. The only deadlines are self-imposed. While the readership may look forward to frequent updates and may be disappointed when a blog goes dormant for awhile, there is an unspoken understanding that the keeper of the blog is doing this of their own accord and can start or stop posting at any time for any reason. When a dormant blog starts up again, it is not unusual for it to be greeted with warm welcomes of “glad you’re back” and “missed you” even if the person never went anywhere and was still a frequent presence in the community of sites such as Twitter. However, at no time is there ever any identifiable pressure to update or keep a blog.

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital recordings made by some members of the community to inform and entertain others. Podcasts can be done in either audio or video format but the audio format is most common within the community in this study because it enables the audience to download and listen to them on the go. Many runners listen to podcasts while they run. Others report listening to them in the car.

Members record podcasts, either solo, or as a team of two or three, and upload them to a service such as iTunes where listeners subscribe to them. Podcasts are downloaded to a mobile device, such as an iPod or smartphone when the listener synchs his or her device to iTunes.

Podcasts are also a way individual members discover one another. By searching iTunes using terms such as “running”, “marathon”, or “marathon running,” individuals discover others with similar interests. Oftentimes, a podcaster will include his or her contact information, such as their twitter name, their Facebook page, and their blog. Podcasts are another way for individuals to promote their products or causes and also to gain sponsorship from companies that cater to runners and endurance athletes, shoe companies, tech gear companies, nutrition and supplement companies, etc.
It is through this web where meaning is made, both for the community and for the individuals. In the following section we will explore how this happens by examining the participants actions and interactions through the lens of the two research questions.

Findings

This study set out to explore how a community of endurance athletes present themselves to one another and function as a community using social networks. To accomplish this goal, the study followed the community of endurance athletes through part of the spring marathon season in order to answer two primary questions: 1) What are the norms, practices, and markers of the community? 2) What patterns of participation or membership are there? Each of these questions is explored below.

Research Question 1: What are the norms, practices, and markers of community members?

For the purposes of this study, norms are the unspoken rules of behavior that guide participation in the community. There are four types of norms: folkways, mores, taboos, and laws. Folkways are the conventions that guide behavior. They are the rules of etiquette for how participants interact with each other. Mores are the moral rules of the community that serve to delineate the social lines that should not be crossed. Taboos are actions forbidden by the community. Violation of a taboo could result in a member being censured, ostracized, or blocked from community membership. Laws are the formal rules of behavior for the community. These are set forth in the Terms of Agreement from each provider and not subject to community sanction. Practices refer to the things members do on a daily basis to interact as a community. And, markers are the symbols representing membership in the community and serve as indicators for both credibility and status.
**Norms**

The social web has enabled people to self-organize around common interests regardless of geographical constraints into what Wellman B., Boase J., Chen W. (2010) describe as networked individualism where “boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are flatter and more recursive” (p. 160). Because of this open nature, the social web puts forth several unique challenges when it comes to developing community norms. For many of the study participants, Twitter is not only a place to meet up with other endurance athletes but also a place to meet up with other friends, sometimes family, and also co-workers or others whose relationship is primarily defined through a professional association. Therefore the norms that guide the community must be balanced by the need for individuals to move between these multiple networks. This individual accomplishes this through using multiple fronts.

Fronts are the persona, or mask, an individual puts on to meet the expectations of the circumstance (Goffman, 1959). An individual will have as many different fronts as they have interests or obligations. For example, an individual will put on a different front when he or she is at work than they do when we there are attending a family event. Within each circumstance the individual has certain behavioral expectations placed upon them by the audience. At work an individual is expected to put on a formal front that is designed to “express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer” (1959, p.77). At home an individual can be more of our their true self and put on what Goffman refers to as their back stage front—a more relaxed persona that is not defined by the rules and tasks of a job, but reflect how an individual behaves in more unguarded moments when they do no necessarily have to be anybody.

However, communities formed via the social web lack a physical or geographical space that serves as the stage setting or queue indicating which persona to put on. This lack of physical boundaries between audiences’ means the luxury of “audience segregation,” where an individual expresses different aspects of themselves to different audiences depending upon the context, is lost (Goffman, 1959). Instead, multiple audiences, with multiple expectations, simultaneously watching an individual’s activity are found. Individuals overcome the lack of physical boundaries by adopting multiple “front stage” personas (Chambers, 2012). These personas can be distinguished as primary and secondary front stage personas where one persona will be dominant but where the audience makes allowances for the other personas when required.
Based on the information shared on Twitter profile pages, blog sites, and podcast topics, the primary mask worn front stage for the participants in this study is that of an endurance athlete. All (19) study participants with Twitter accounts identify themselves as an athlete in their profile either through text and/or images. The theme of thirteen of fourteen participants who had blogs was about endurance sports (running, swimming, cycling). The four participant podcasts were about endurance sports. This meant the audience expectation was that the individual conduct himself or herself in a certain (folk)way. The overall expectation by the audience was that all interaction takes place under the umbrella of being fellow endurance athletes. This expectation is unspoken but a given for community membership. Endurance athletes share a particular worldview that includes certain characteristic traits including “a trust in one’s own abilities, belief in the future and reason, and a drive for ruthless self-improvement” (Berking and Neckel, 1993, p.69). For many athletes running long distances is a way to bring order out of the chaos that everyday life can seem to be (Sheehan, 2010). There is a desire to test both physical and mental boundaries and of wanting to do something because it is seen as difficult or impossible because learning to control the body and the mind is seen as “the easiest step toward improving the quality of life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.94.)

It is unspoken but expected that community members share these traits in some form or another. Zenon, a marathoner from North Carolina, captures this spirit in his tweet about a morning appointment to visit his orthopedic surgeon to check to see if his foot is healing correctly. “I have a racing season to get back to! #running”. Or this tweet by Aphrodisios, a marathoner from Tennessee, “relentless is the word of the year.” Or Timoteus, an ironman from Minnesota who posted on DailyMile “Swimming was a struggle this morning, I made it through and got the workout done, but it wasn’t as fun as swimming has been lately.” Or Sophia who Tweets “Run. Get injured. Recover. Build miles. Get injured. Repeat ad nauseum. Why is it so hard to do something I love, that keeps me sane?” And Aphrodisios who captures the transitive outlook of community members with this tweet, “My athletic bucket list includes: 4:30 mile, 2:50 marathon, and getting paid to run (at least once).”

Sometimes it was necessary for a community member to break character and assume another front. However, due to its lack of a hierarchical page structure, the individual must do this while on the same stage. Katz, et al noted that social networks consist of a series of overlapping relationships, and it is the relationship between individuals that bind them together (2004). For example Aspasia, a runner living in The Netherlands, is a member of a running community, a grad school community, and a community of young mothers all on Twitter. So when Aspasia
tweets twice about a book on parenting she’s reading, *Setting Limits* by Robert MacKenzie, “It’s been an eye-opener & I’m so glad I’m reading it now when changing behavior is still easy,” her intended audience is her community of young mothers. Her unintended audience, the running and grad school communities, must make an allowance for this break in character. If an individual intends to break character for an extended period they will often warn the community, like when Demetria an ultra runner living in Phoenix who is also structural engineer tweets about something job related: “Fair warning: I have to climb a lot of shady apartment stairs and ladders tomorrow, so there may have been a lot of complaining.”

Laws are the formal rules of behavior for the community. In this study, these were set forth in the *Terms of Agreement* from each provider and not subject to community sanction. However, individual members are expected to stay within the bounds of mores and taboos. Mores, standards of acceptable behavior, are more formal than folkways; however, unlike Laws, the community polices them. Taboos are those acts that are forbidden by the community an example of which would be hostile or inappropriate act toward another individual. No violation of mores or taboos was observed during this study. Occasionally, their importance was highlighted when conversation turned toward political or social issues. For example, Cleopatra, an ironman from Vancouver, BC, and Alexis, a marathoner from Massachusetts, got into an exchange about the value of unions. Cleopatra is an elementary school teacher whose union was on strike while the study was taking place. One evening she was having a conversation on Twitter with someone not in the study about what was going on. Alexis, who is a software executive, interjected his opinion that came across as not sympathetic toward unions in general and therefore unsympathetic to Cleopatra’s current predicament. However, neither crossed the line and insulted the other and in the end they agreed to disagree.

**Practices**

Practices are the things community members do on a daily basis to interact with each other. Practices are bound by a set of rules and expectations. On a macro level, the norms and markers of the community frame its practices. And on a micro level, the front each individual has created for him or herself frames how they interact. Therefore, practices are done in character—the individual must present himself or herself within the accepted guidelines of community behavior and they must do so by presenting themselves in the manner the audience expects.
During the period of observation three kinds of general practices were observed: 1) Conversational Practices, 2) Inspirational Practices, and 3) Promotional Practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational</th>
<th>Inspirational</th>
<th>Promotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Looking forward to a long workout and a quiet night at home to catch up. Ahhh.” – Timo, Twitter</td>
<td>“If it is sunny, go for a run to enjoy the sun. If it is cloudy, go for a run to beat the blues. If it is snowy, go for a run; it’s peaceful” – Aphrodisios, Twitter</td>
<td>Phile tweets a link to a blog post “Battling My I Can’t Monster: Thoughts On Hypermobility”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This airplane is approximately negative 50 degrees.” – Demetria, Twitter</td>
<td>Phaedrus blogs “Fascination with the ability of the human mind to take us places we never thought possible…” and writes about the role sports and fitness can play in it.</td>
<td>Alexis tweets “Do a guy a favor and read the intro for the RunRinLive Podcast” includes a link to the intro on his site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s warm enough to run in my booty shorts. Yes!” – Giane, Twitter</td>
<td>“Good luck to all of you running Marathons or Halves tomorrow.” – Zenon, Twitter</td>
<td>Leonidas shared a link to a book on Facebook “Nutrition For Fitness (Train With The Coach) eBook: Coach Jeff: Kindle Store” Coch Jeff is his coach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Conversational Practices*—defined as informal, light, or casual exchanges—were the most common form of interaction among participants. Conversational practices included status updates made on Twitter as well as conversations between two or more individuals. These conversations were not always related to endurance sports. More often they were not. Conversational practices serve a dual role in social web communities. First, they help to overcome the absence of geographical togetherness—the notion that individuals who live within
relatively close proximity to one another form communities. And second, they overcome the lack of presence of a physical body (Cohen, 2008). Community members rarely, if ever, meet one another in person.

To understand the important role conversational practices play in holding the community together, it is necessary to first explore the medium where these practices take place. The vast majority of conversation took place on Twitter in the form of tweets—status updates where individuals shared what they were doing, thinking, and feeling at any given moment. The premise of Twitter is for the individual to answer the question, “What am I doing at this very moment?” The vast majority of tweets posted answered that question. Most of these tweets go unanswered. This example from my Twitter feed illustrates this.

Demetria: “Stupid autocorrect turns goldrush into goldfish.”
Demetria: “Hooray! #gloryhole RT [name removed] A humble thanks on season three congrats! We love you guys and will do our best!!!! #goldrush”
Demetria: RT [name removed] it is really impressive how unhealthy the major healthy living bloggers are.”
Cleopatra: Failure in teachers’ bargaining goes beyond the nature of BCTF [link to a news article]”
Leon: “Come on [name removed], I need you to pull through this! #my600blife”
Leon: “I want to be in balance!
RunnerG: just finished recording my piece for [name removed] podcast 9on iTunes) w @[name removed] & @[name removed]…don’t think it’s TMI. Who knows?”
Aphrodisios: Kermit the Frog is my role model. He chases his dreams with reckless abandon & encourages people along the way.”
Timo: “Some nights you just need the big hideous pink robe…”

In this example six members of the community are posting to Twitter at the same time. Each is posting what is on their mind at the moment. Demetria tweeted three times, once about her issues with auto-correct on her cell phone, once about a podcast she enjoys, and once about her opinion of the unhealthy habits of some fitness bloggers. Cleopatra tweeted about the current
state of the teacher’s strike of which she is affected, Leon about a television show on obesity and then about wanting life balance, RunnerG about her podcast, Aphrodisios about his aspirations, and Timo about her current state of mind. None of the participants are talking to each other and no one replied to any of them. Instead, these tweets served as a representation of each of these individuals as a member of a networked community of which I am the center node (Wellman, Boase, Chen, 2002). And, these tweets serve the purpose of letting me, as the center node in my network; know what is on their mind. These tweets would also serve the same purpose over a series of networks where other individuals are the center node (Katz, et al, 2008). Unanswered tweets populating the twitter stream may serve to overcome the absence of geographical togetherness and creating a sense of community in the mind of the individuals involved (Cohen, 2008).

Communities formed on the web lack a physical or geographical space where someone can be seen without being heard. There are no gyms participants in these communities can all go to for training. Nor are there social clubs where they can all get together to bond. Early web-based communities used newsgroups and discussion forums to overcome this geographical limitation. These were spaces centered on a specific topic and were structured according to topical hierarchies (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social networking sites, such as Twitter, are an inadequate stand in for a physical space because like their predecessors they do not exist in the geographical context of the physical world. They have the additional limitation of not being topic-centric or hierarchical the way newsgroups and discussion forums are. Whereas a newsgroup on running may have a home page and underneath it have pages of sub-categories for beginners and advanced runners or for those interested in running marathons or 10Ks by nature, social networking sites are flat blank slates. At its most basic, Twitter functions as a conversational free-for-all where anyone can post their thoughts about anything. Individuals overcome this limitation by following only others who share similar interests. If you join a newsgroup, you join all the other members of that group. Individuals who prefer social networking sites to traditional web-based newsgroups or forums do so because they have the power to decide who can be part of their community by selecting who their followers and friends are. Instead of an individual being a member of several distinct communities they now reside at the center of a series of overlapping networks of interest. For example, Aspasia, a runner living in The Netherlands, is a member of a running community, a grad school community, and a community of young mothers. And rather than Aspasia having to visit three different web sites as
part of her membership in three distinct communities, they now all come to her in a stream of information through her Twitter feed.

Status updates are ways for the individual to let other members of the community know they are still around. They possibly serve as a way to overcome the lack of a physical presence. The tweets in effect become a proxy standing in for the individual whose community does not necessarily exist in the neighborhood where he or she lives but is instead scattered about the world. A community ecosystem is thus formed through the reciprocal practice of the individual posting tweets so other members of the community can sense his or her presence and the collection of these tweets from others whom the individual identifies as being part of his or her community. The following stream of tweets that appeared in my feed provides an example.

Aspasia: “Ran 3.31 miles in 34 mins and felt good. Study-break run, nice & slow. Lovely & sunny and the break away from my ess...[link to full post on DailyMile]”
Alexis: “Subscribe to [name removed] on-line Magazine on Kindle...Great content...The link [removed]
Theodosios: “Ran 10.01 kilometers in 56 mins and felt good. Legs still sore from Sunday, especially right ham, but felt pretty go...[link to full post on DailyMile]
RunnerG: Forgot to pack both my bra and my underwear w my work clothes in my gym bag.no time to go home.ah well...#sheerbrilliance
Phile: “oh lunchtime runners through the City of London – shorts and sports bras and blazing sun! Spring in London can be FANTASTIC. 😊
Alexis: “India’s military weakness revealed in leaked letter – [link to the news story] (Indian politics make US politics look like pillow fights)”
Phaedrus: “I see crazy people...We’re all at the gym at this time of day #GettingItDone”
Alexis: “Find a copy of my book of running stories [title removed] on Amazon (regular and Kindle) -> [link removed]”

Conversational practices in this study served as both the community meeting place and as representations of the individual community members. Conversational practices strengthened the feeling of community by helping individuals find others who shared common interests. Radcliffe-
Brown noted that relationships between individuals are not the result of there being similar interests between them, but rather because there is a mutual common interest in one another (1940). It may be that through the process of discovery individuals first connected over their common interest in endurance sports but that would not be enough, in and of itself, to keep them connected long enough for a community to form. The more individuals find they have in common with one another, the stronger the bonds between them. An unanswered tweet by Sophia, a marathoner living in British Columbia, illustrates this point: “Good morning! I’m getting ready for a 2-hour run, then brunch, then seeing what bands are playing for Celticfest. Anyone game?”

In her tweet, the common interest that connected her to other endurance athletes, “I’m getting ready for a 2-hour run,” is found, and two other markers of her identity are also apparent when she states she will be going to brunch and “then seeing what bands are playing for Celticfest.”

The word brunch is a combination of the words breakfast and lunch and is a meal usually eaten over the weekend or on special occasions or holidays sometime between late morning and early afternoon. Brunches tend to be sophisticated meals containing a combination of items. Oftentimes alcohol is part of the meal. Brunch is eaten at a leisurely pace and usually with people who have a close personal relationship to each other. To say one is going to a brunch indicates that the individual has an air of cultivation and sophistication about themselves. The Urban Dictionary defines brunch as a meal “typically reserved for snobs and biddies who like tea and jam” (http://www.urbandictionary.com/). That Sophia is going for a two-hour run followed by brunch indicates to others that she likes to both push her body to the limit and also enjoy something of a finer pleasure in a meal.

The next part of her tweet concerns a music festival she is interested in, one that features a specific genre. Celtic music is a genre of music that evolved out of the folk music traditions of the pre-Roman peoples living in Western Europe (Wikipedia.org). Celtic music, and Celtic culture comes from the people living in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales and features bagpipes, harp, and other string instruments as part of the ensemble (Wikipedia.org). Like her meal of choice for the day, this music festival adds to the impression that Sophia has a refined and cultured taste.

The final part of her Tweet, “Anyone game?” is an invitation for others to join in. This indicates a friendly and welcoming personality. So, from Sophia’s unanswered tweet it is learned that she enjoys pushing her body to its limits, that she has a sophisticated taste in food and music, and that she is welcoming and friendly. It is likely that those people who follow Sophia on Twitter who share the same interests (in testing the body, in enjoyment of food and music) will form a stronger bond with Sophia that those who only share the singular instance of endurance
sports, especially if the individual identifies these interests as part of his or her core identity (Radcliff-Brown, 1940). Over time, and through a series of unanswered tweets, individuals presumably begin to identify strongly with others and a community is formed. Christakis and Fowler (2009) noted this phenomenon in their study of social networks (networked communities). In online communities individuals grow stronger attachments to others based on the number of things they have in common with each other: “These ties, the particular pattern of these ties, are often more important than the individual people themselves” (p.9).

*Inspirational Practices* are the things community members share to inspire others. They take the form of tweets containing quotes from athletes, politicians, and other successful people on managing life or achieving goals. This practice is geared to the entire community and not toward a specific person or persons. This tweet by Aphrodisios is an example of an inspirational practice: “Being realistic is the most commonly traveled road to mediocrity. What’s the point of being realistic?” – Will Smith”. So is this tweet by Phaedrus: ‘Good morning! Where u headed to today? Gym? Swim? Bike? Run? Work? Have a great day!” Sometimes inspirational tweets take the form of a link to a news article or blog post such as when Aphrodisios tweeted a link to an online news article about a teacher in Knoxville, TN who dropped 100 pounds and planned to run the Knoxville Half Marathon in a few days.

Community members who make these types of posts generally serve the role or persona of supportive-educator. They tend to not engage in the interpersonal conversational practices of other community members. The front that they assume is one that can be said to be “all business.” These members are likely members of the community for their combined passion for endurance sports and mentoring others. This tweet from Aphrodisios captures “Kermit the Frog is my role model. He chases his dreams with reckless abandon & encourages people along the way.” As does this greeting found on the home page of Alexis’ blog *Run2Live*:

“*Welcome to Run2Live*

Come run with us!

Transform your life!

“There a millions of normal, everyday folks like us who use running as a way to lead a balanced, happy and challenging lifestyle. Would you like to learn from them?”
“I have had the privilege to have kicked around the…sport for some time. I’ve learned a ton about myself and running. I’ve met a whole bunch of incredible people. We’re going to share all this with you.

“Listen to the podcast and learn from experts and regular Joe’s – get that inspiration and affirmation you need.

“Read the blog for a frequent smattering of humor and insight.

“I’ll see you out there.”

In contrast, there was a secondary inspirational practice that was more intimate in that it was directed toward an individual or a small subset of individuals within the community. This kind of inspirational practice was not restricted to those who assume the teacher role in the community. On the contrary, community members who are seen as just being one of the guys/gals usually participate in this kind of inspirational practice. An example of this style of practice is provide by Phile, a triathlete from London, who gave a “shout out” to four of her followers who live in Berlin and were running their first half marathon: “May you be bitten by the love bug ;-).” Shout outs are ways of calling attention to other individuals who are about to do something special, such as participate in their first event. Shout outs are often retweeted—the practice of re-posting tweets by other community members as a way to show encouragement and provide an overture of acceptance.

A third type of inspirational practice is the Twitter custom of Follow Fridays where individuals tweet the names of Twitter users they recommend others to follow and tag it with the hashtag #followfriday or #FF. Follow Friday tweets are ways to introduce other members into the community. In effect the individual making the tweet is vouching for the credibility of the individuals mentioned. They serve as an introduction to the club. And because Twitter is not a single network but is instead a series of overlapping networks based on interests, the individual sending a tweet of this kind will often preface it with an indicator of the intended audience. For example, Herakleios, a marathoner from Massachusetts, tweeted a Follow Friday to “some special running Tweeps” and then went on to list them.

Promotional Practices are the things individuals do to call attention to something they would like to offer or share with others. Promotional practices do not apply to status updates related to accomplishments or workout results. Those updates are the kind expected from the other members of the community and serve as a marker of membership (described in the next section). There are two types of promotional practices: ones that promote the goods and services
of the individual doing the promotion and another when they are directed towards promoting the goods and services of others. It is common for all members of the community to promote out to the group whenever they publish a new blog post or podcast. Some examples include this tweet by Aphrodisios that includes a link to a blog post of his “A Word to the Newbie Runner.” Or this tweet from Alexis, a marathoner from Boston, to an instructional video he made and posted on YouTube titled, “Taping the plantar fascia.” Both Alexis and Aphrodisios take the supportive/educational role as their front within the community. So does Leonidas, a marathoner turned ironman who does a weekly podcast from his home in Denver, tweets “Streaming live now! Come join the show and chat at [URL]. Tonight: so, you got your first bike…”

Individuals who keep personal/reflexive journal-style blogs will also post out to the community when he or she publishes a new post. For example, Phaedrus, an ironman from Hendersonville, TN, wrote on his blog about his “Fascination with the ability of the human mind to take us places we never thought possible…” and writes about the role sports and fitness can play in it. He posted a link to the post on Twitter, so his followers would be aware of it. Or Giane, a marathoner from Ontario, Canada, who goes by the pseudonym RunnerG across the web, posted this promotional tweet about a podcast she does with two other runners, one in Australia and one in England: “just finished recording my piece for Run World Radio podcast (on iTunes)…don’t think it’s TMI. who knows?”

In addition to making promotional posts about products (blogs posts and podcasts) that are available at no cost, community members will also promote products they sell. This tweet from Alexis is a good example “Find a copy of my book of running stories [Book Title Removed] (regular and Kindle) -->” Alexis includes a link to the Amazon page where the book can be purchased with the tweet. Along a similar line, Leonidas tweeted about an event the company he works for is sponsoring, “Want to race with Team [name removed] at Ironman Canada?” and a link to the Ironman Canada page where you could register. These are all examples of the first type of promotional practice—one in which the individual is promoting something about which they have a vested interest; however, there is another type of promotional practice—one directed towards promoting the goods and services of others.

Community members will often post items about a product or cause they believe in. Syntyche, a runner from Louisiana, tweeted a link to a promotional piece by Run Louisiana with the hashtag #RunLA. “Love these folks” Doing GREAT things for Louisiana health. Excited about the 2012 Run Louisiana Tour.” Syntyche does several things within the 140-character limitation of Twitter to express her support for this cause. She uses the words “Love” “GREAT”
“Excited” when mentioning it. “GREAT” is capitalized. Capitalization is the equivalent of shouting on the web and by capitalizing the word great Syntyche is adding emphasis to the value she places on the work being done by Run Louisiana. She also closes with the event hashtag “#RunLA”. Hastags play an important part in linking together personal and communication networks across the web. A hashtag is created when the pound sign (#) is placed in front of a word or phrase, e.g. #RunLA. Hashtags provide a means of grouping similar messages together across the social web. For example, by using the #RunLA hashtag in her tweet, Sytyche’s tweet will be collected and added to all the other Tweets that included the same hashtag. Anyone can click on the hashtag and be immediately taken to a Twitter page listing all the tweets around this topic that used the same hashtag. The use of hash tags is a powerful way to easily bring people together who share a common interest forming an impromptu and often temporary sub-community network.

**Markers**

*Markers* are the symbols representing membership in the community and serve as indicators for both credibility and status. In this study, there were two kinds of markers—fixed and transitory. *Fixed markers* are the more permanent representations of the self. They include the biographies and profiles individuals set up on various social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and DailyMile. It also includes the static information that remains always available and in the forefront of their blog site. Transitory markers are items that are in the foreground for the audience to see for only a brief period of time. Transitory items include daily workout stats, fitness updates, and race reports.

The primary fixed marker of membership in this community was how an individual presents himself or herself using their Twitter profile. The profile feature on Twitter allows the individual to post a photo and a header. The photo is defined by Twitter as “your identity” and appears with all your tweets. The header is the larger image; 1252x626 is the recommended size, which appears at the top of your Twitter homepage. Additional information on the profile page includes your name. Twitter encourages people to use their real name so people who know you can easily recognize you. The name you select becomes your Twitter web address. For example, I use my real name on Twitter and so my web address is [https://twitter.com/jeffswain](https://twitter.com/jeffswain). Giane uses the pseudonym “RunnerG” and so her Twitter address ends with “/RunnerG”. Other options users
can include are their geographic location, a website address, and a brief biography, 160 characters or less. The profile page also contains information automatically included such as the number of tweets the individual has sent out, the number of followers they have, and the number of others whom they follow. Unlike Facebook, where a friendship is formed by mutual agreement, Twitter enables one person to follow another without the act being reciprocated.

The profile page serves as the setting, or stage, where the individual is expected to play a certain role (Goffman, 1959). It serves as a stand-in, or front, representing the individual who may or may not be on Twitter at the moment. The profile page is where individuals go when they wish to learn more about someone. They go there to see information and read some of the individual’s tweets to determine if there is enough interest to follow them. Here is an example of my profile page.

![Profile Page Example](image)

**Figure 4 - 1 Example Of A Twitter Profile Page**

For the participants in this study, that role is one of an endurance athlete and all of their profile pages represent this aspect of the self in some way. All of the participants indicate this in their biographical information using words and phrases such as: “Swim. Bike. Run. Repeat,” “Triathlete|Runner,” “Marathoner,” “Ultra Runner,” “Swimmer,” “Distance Runner,” “Trail Marathoner,” “Avid Long-Distance Runner,” and “Ironman”.

Thirteen participants also included other biographical information such as: “Mom to 3,” “reformed rebel,” “dog lover,” “reader,” “foodie,” “Software Exec,” “structural engineer,” “Grad student,” “communications professional,” “Father and husband,” “Wife,” and “vegetarian”.

Eight of the participants use their real name in their profile and eleven use a pseudonym. Eight participants had a picture of themselves in athletic gear as their profile photo. Three used an image of endurance sports as their header, three used a non-athletic image, and the rest used the default black image. All sixteen of the participants who also have blogs listed their blog address in their profile. All study participants listed their geographical location. **Note:** All participant names, user IDs, and pseudonyms used here are fictitious.

A secondary fixed marker is found in the participant’s home page of his or her blog. A review of these sites indicated participants used them in one of two ways—as a personal journal or as a community support/educational forum. Personal journal blogs are reflexive. It is a space where the site owner chronicles their journey as an endurance athlete. Support and educational blogs are outward facing and are designed to provide useful information to other endurance athletes on topics such as gear and equipment, nutrition and exercise, and events. In either case, the site’s web address serves as a key identifier. Participants who use a pseudonym on Twitter will often use that pseudonym as part of the blog site address. For example, just as my Twitter address contains my full name, so does my blog address [http://jeffswain.net/](http://jeffswain.net/). Similarly, Giane, who goes by the pseudonym RunngerG on Twitter, uses her pseudonym as both the name of her blog and as part of her blog’s address, runnerg’sblog.com. Others use a variation of their Twitter name as their blog address. Aphrodisios goes by RunWise on Twitter and his blog is called *WiseRun*, WiseRun.com. Others will use their brand name for their site. For example, Alexis uses his real name on Twitter but uses the name of his podcast Run2Live as the name for his blog site as well. Another participant, Phile, who got into endurance sports as a way to offset a chronic and debilitating condition, uses her mantra “won’t stop me” as the title of and blog address for her blog. In all cases, participants use their identity, in the form of their name or a pseudonym, or their focus, such as a tag line or a mantra, as the address for their blog site. Doing this serves two purposes. It makes it easier for others to find them on the web, and it helps to keep a consistent stage setting (Goffman, 1959) for the audience members because they know what role to expect the individual to play as they follow them across the web.

The blog sites landing page serves the same purpose as the Twitter profile page in helping to create the proper front in the form of the stage setting. The landing page is usually either the site’s home page or blog page. And because of its architectural construction, it can
contain more detailed biographical information. All of the blogs in this study contained a header at the top of the page consisting of the blog title and tagline or catch phrase. However, there is a difference in wording depending on the intent of the site owner. Those who use their blog as a personal journal use a more intimate introduction in the header. This could be something simple such as the tagline for my blog *A Body in Motion: My Adventures in Life and Marathons* or something more complex. Or Asphasia’s blog, *InFocus*, that has the tag “Learning to focus on the shiny lights in life, project by glorious project” atop her blog. Or Cleopatra who has a George Eliot quote above her self-named blog, “It’s never too late to be what you might have been.”

**Note:** All blog titles and URLs are fictitious as are all participant names and pseudonyms.

Other journal-style blogs have a more descriptive header. The header on Giane’s blog *RunnerG* reads, “I’ve been running for 6 years with a great group of people in Waterloo Canada. This blog describes my races, my reflections as I build strength, speed, and confidence and acts as a record of my achievements, my disappointments and all the great stuff along the way.” Phile’s blog, *Won’t Stop Me* uses the tag line “I TRI because I CAN…What do you do, just because you can? Me? I do triathlons. Not because I am fast. And not because I am particularly athletic. But Because I can. And I hope I can for a very long time.” There is a challenge there made by Phile, both to the reader and to herself. Phile offsets the tone of this introduction with a picture of herself wearing running gear, posing and smiling. It is a welcoming image that invites the reader in. Then to the right of her image, in a side column is a description of the disease she has been diagnosed with along with information on how the reader can make a donation to help fund research for finding a cure.

*a body in motion - my adventures in life & marathons*

![Figure 4 - 2 Example Of A Blog Heading](image)

While the journal-style blogs have a more inward focus in the tag line used in the blog heading, the more supportive/educational blogs take an outward approach focusing on the reader.
For example, Aphrodisios’s blog, *WiseRun*, uses the tag line “Get the results you want, one step at a time.” And Alexis uses the tag line “Home for your running life” on his blog *Run2Live*. Both of these tag lines indicate are based on the assumption that the reader is there looking for information, and Aphrodisios and Alexis use their blog tag lines to indicate to the reader that they have come to the right place.

Another difference found between journal-style and educational-style blogs is in the number of and type of supporting pages found there. Many of the journal-style blogs are single page sites. These sites consist of a main page where the site owner chronicles their experiences and, perhaps, a link to a page titled *About Me* where some additional personal information is provided. Some journal-style blogs contain additional pages covering other interests. Cleopatra’s site contains additional pages related to her training and races. She also has a page devoted to the times where she was interviewed about participating in endurance sports. Cleopatra also has another page containing audio files of her singing. In addition to competing in triathlons, Cleopatra also enjoys singing and has uploaded a few audio files of her performing. Phaedrus, a triathlete from Tennessee, uses the tag line “Once I begin to hurt is when I begin to grow” on his blog and in addition to his blog page also has pages dedicated to his training regimen, race results, and inspirational quotes he has collected.

For the educational-style blogs the supporting pages also tend to be less about the site owner and more outwardly directed toward the reader. Aphrodisios has pages on health and nutrition, product reviews, and training on his blog *WiseRun*. He also has a page devoted to people asking him questions, *Ask RunWise About Running*. Aphrodisios, like Phaedrus, also has a page of inspirational quotes, but it is interesting to note how they present them to the reader. Phaedrus states that these quotes represent a “collection of my favorite thoughts” while Aphrodisios indicates these quotes are meant for others in the title of the page “Quotes For Runners.” Both pages contain quotes the site owners found valuable. The difference lies in how they are presented to the reader. Phaedrus found these quotes as having personal meaning and is sharing something of himself with the reader. This fits in to the revelatory style of a personal journal blog. Aphrodisios presents his inspirational quotes as something that is directed toward the reader because they will benefit the reader. In either case both Phaedrus and Aphrodisios maintain a consistent front in the form of the setting for the reader.

In all blogs but one, the landing page was the blog page. All blogs, regardless of purpose, also include ways readers can connect with them, such as following them on Twitter, friending them on Facebook or DailyMile, and subscribing to the blog or podcast. Both style of blogs also
listed any professional affiliations related to endurance sports the site owner may have as well as any products they may sell or endorse. As mentioned, Phile has a link to donate to the charity she supports. She also has a page listing the professional organizations that support her. Phaedrus also has a page listing the professional organizations that he is affiliated with. Both Alexis and Aphrodisis have pages listing books they have authored along with links to sites where they can be purchased.

In addition to the fixed markers of membership in the community in the form of Twitter profiles and blog sites, there are also transitory markers of membership. Transitory markers are generally specific kinds of updates provided by community members that appear in the form of tweets—posts to Twitter—and blog posts. The most common type of transitory marker is the daily posting of training results to Twitter and Facebook, though Twitter is the most common place to find these kinds of posts. An example of this kind of post is this tweet from Giane about getting out early for a training run, “Gm! Off to run my 4th 10 miler in 4 days…on 2 hours of sleep this time. Should be interesting”. Or this one from Phile, “Swam 2000 meters in 45 mins and felt good. 5 sets of 400”. Eunike, a marathoner living along the northeast coast of Scotland, kept everyone on Facebook apprised of her goal of running everyday for a year with posts such as this “Day 95 #runstreak – I’m loving it 😊”. Or Timo, a recent first time marathoner from Missouri, who Tweets about her progress recovering from injury “walked (“.15 miles in 1:47 and felt good. Warm up”) then a run “Ran 1.17 miles in 11 mins and 51 secs and felt great. Remarkable! First run outside in a long time…” “Run was great! Now to bike”.

DailyMile is often used as a place to keep an electronic training record. Eighteen study participants have accounts with DailyMile. Participants will use DailyMile as the place to record their training, and because DailyMile has the ability to share data with Twitter and Facebook, participants will often do so. For example Phile posted her swim training results to DailyMile, and since she has her DailyMile account connected with her Twitter account, an abbreviated post simultaneously appeared on Twitter. The Tweet appeared as “Swam 2000 meters in 45 mins and felt good. 5 sets of 400” and included a link to the full posting on DailyMile, which included additional information such as an image of the pool where she swam, she was on vacation with her husband at the time, with the caption, “Today’s playground”.

If a community member feels he or she has been neglecting training, in the posting of his or her training results, she may tweet something to reaffirm her status. Sophia, a marathoner living in British Columbia, tweeted, “Look at me, putting my swimming gear in my bag for tomorrow! Haven’t been for a swim in months.” Or Alexis who tweeted “I’m going to start posting my training again… It’s a bit ad hoc at this point but I should be keeping a record, yeah?” with a link to his page on Dailymile.

Another type of transitory marker is one of accomplishment. Training for a marathon or ironman is a long a grueling process full of highs and lows, successes and failures, numbers upon numbers of training times, duration, pace and exertion. The process can begin to feel like a tedious struggle, so when something happens out of the ordinary that is good, it is not uncommon for someone to share. For example, Zenon tweeted “Today is my last day as a Marathon virgin!!!!” the day before his first marathon. Or Giane who tweeted “new 4mi PR[Personal Record]…kinda wild. :0”

A final type of transitory marker is one of future thinking in the form of goal setting. It is when community members share not what they have accomplished, or what they have done, but rather what they aim to do and whom they want to become. Timoteus, an ultra marathoner living in Minnesota, posted on Facebook about his dream to complete the 100-mile Western States Endurance Run: “Someday I’ll earn one of these beauties” along with a link to a video on YouTube, “The Buckle”. The prize for completing the 100-mile run is a commemorative belt
buckle. The race is extremely difficult; full of steep climbs and long descents, and earning a belt buckle is a mark of prestige of the highest order for endurance athletes worldwide.

Transitory markers are dynamic, having only a brief time on the stage. However they play a key role in community membership because they serve as an affirmation that the individual is who he or she represents himself or herself to be. For endurance athletes, the mindset tends to be not one of being, but one of becoming (Hagood, 2008). There in an implicit trajectory of growth involved when someone puts himself or herself forward as an athlete of this kind, and these transitory markers show that the individual is living up to the bargain—that they are playing the role expected of them when they walk out on the stage. After all, it was the individual himself who constructed the stage and invited the audience in to see the performance. Transitory markers represent the performer on the stage and they must align with the fixed markers described above if the audience is to accept the performance as credible. After their brief life on the stage, transitory markers become part of the stage setting itself and therefore fixed. If these markers do not align, or if the audience perceives the performance to be different than what was anticipated, the front put forth by the individual could be rejected (Goffman, 1959). This could result in the loss of interaction with the other members of the community. Individuals could be ignored or excluded from the conversation or removed as a follower or friend altogether.

In summary, ascertained from the first question was that community members manage these visibly open networks by assuming multiple front-stage personas with one persona being the primary mask, or role the individual plays. The ability to have multiple front-stage personas requires acceptance from the various audiences involved. These fronts are more informal, taking on a more backstage style, where the individual acts more like him or herself and less like a role they are required to play (Chambers, 2008). These fronts play out through the daily communication practices of community members. There are three types of communication practices—conversational, inspirational, and promotional. Conversational practices serve both to create the community space and represent the individual community members. They also strengthen the feeling of community by helping individuals find others who share many common interests. Inspirational practices are the things community members offer to inspire others. Promotional practices are the things individuals do to call attention to something they would like to offer or share with others.

From these practices, two personality types were identified: A personal/reflexive type and an educational/supportive type. Personal/reflexive personality types communicate in a style that is focus inward and tends to be revelatory. Educational/supportive personality types have an
outward facing persona that is focused on how they can teach and inspire the reader. Markers of membership in the community provide credibility and confer status on the individuals of both personality types. There are two types of markers—fixed and transitory. Fixed markers are the more permanent displays such as the individual’s Twitter profile page. Transitory markers such as the individual’s Tweets are more fleeting. Ties between community members are strengthened by additional common interests, such as humor, professional affiliations, books, movies, and such. These ties serve to move the individuals from when they were brought together by a similar interest to being interested in one another (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). This must be kept in mind when examining patterns of participation or membership.

**Research Question 2: What patterns of participation or membership are present in the community?**

Answering the previous question—identifying the norms, practices, and markers of the community—provided the parameters for exploring the patterns of participation or membership that took place. A community, for the purposes of this study, was defined as a group of individuals who come together based on common interests, beliefs, or values. Members share a common culture that they perpetuate through the development of norms and practices that are meant to create the desired attitude and behaviors required for membership. This study explored how one networked community found on the social web functioned. According to Wellman, Boase, Chen (2002), membership in a networked community must be defined differently than traditional notions of community membership because networked communities are no longer bound by place but have through the social web morphed into a series of overlapping networks in which each individual resides at the center of his or her own networks. Rather than destroying communities, the social web is transforming them into “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity” (p.153).

**Relationship between participation patterns and displayed personae.**

Patterns of participation are the ways in which community members interact. Data indicating patterns of participation included the means by which members chose to share information, interact with, and support one another. The way an individual participated seemed
connected to the primary personae he or she displayed. Both types of personae (personal/reflexive and educational/supportive) participated in all three identified community practices (conversational, inspirational, and promotional), but how they participated was different depending on their role. An example that illustrates this is found in the way different community members’ tweet about dealing with injuries. Cleopatra’s persona in the community is aligned more with personal/reflective. When tweeting about an injury, she talks of being “stiff” but not injured, “just old ☺” She also does a self-diagnosis: “IT band and lower right calf/Achilles is sore.” Her solution is she needs more core work. She follows this with a post about her Easter plan, “Where did I put my cute bonnet?” And she follows that with a Tweet with a link to a blog post of swim tips, including a YouTube video clip. Compare that with this tweet from Alexis, who displays more of an educator/supporter persona. Alexis suffers from plantar fasciitis, an inflammation of the thick tissue on the bottom of the foot. It is a common injury for endurance athletes. Instead of tweeting about his personal experience dealing with plantar fasciitis, Alexis uploaded a video to YouTube showing other athletes how to tape their foot before a workout in order to minimize the damage. Both share about how they are dealing with an injury; however, Cleopatra’s approach draws the reader into her world. In her tweets we witness her self-diagnosis and medical solution. The reader may take what Cleopatra did and apply it to his or her own situation, she personalized the experience more with the self-deprecating joke about her age and her Easter plans. Alexis also has an injury, but it is not his intention to draw the reader into his situation. Alexis has taken on a persona of an educator/supporter, so he turns something personal in dealing with an injury around from being about himself to showing other athletes how they can deal with it.

Another example of how patterns of participation are shaped by persona can be found in tweets regarding food. Endurance athletes generally try to eat a clean and healthy diet but that does not mean they are not tempted by unhealthy food. Zenon, a marathoner living in North Carolina tweeted about raiding his children’s Easter basket, “I somehow need to work off the pound of robin eggs I ate yesterday.” This is another example of a community member who displays more of a personal/reflexive persona. Zenon invites the reader into his world by sharing his guilt over eating large amounts candy. Compare that with Aphrodisios, who tweeted this around the same time “Proximity to food influences how much of it you eat – James Painter, R.D.” He followed this up with a tweet to a link to the Today Show health page, which had a blog article, “First bite warning: Foods that make you do bad things”.
It would be impossible for someone to stay in persona all the time, and there are examples of when individuals broke character by flipping roles. For example, Aphrodisios broke character and switched to personal/reflexive persona when discussing his dietary changes, when he was diagnosed as being allergic to gluten. He tweeted, “I had vegetables at lunch again…this is getting out of hand!” and “I have eaten vegetables 6 times in the last 3 days. That’s like a month’s worth of vegetables! Will I live through this healthy eating phase?” However, he returned to character by tweeting something in line with his educational/supportive persona minutes later, “POWERFUL post full of important info on RACE DAY NUTRITION for #marathons & endurance events @[name of a fitness account] with a link to the article he was referencing. Aphrodisios also uses several web conventions to increase the reach of his message. Typing in capital letters online is considered to be the same as shouting. Capitalizing “RACE DAY NUTRITION” lends emphasis in the form of a visual cue to the reader. He couples this by capitalizing “POWERFUL” letting the reader know that he thinks this information will be beneficial. The use of the hashtag #marathons means that his tweet will be collected and displayed on a page with other tweets sharing the same hashtag. Putting the ampersand (@) in front of the name of another twitter account means that his tweet will also appear in their Twitter stream. By using the hashtag #marathon and the ampersand @[name removed], Aphrodisios was able to extend the reach of his message beyond his community of followers.

Besides breaking character, individuals abandon one front for another, and switch from one front-stage persona to another. The ability to have multiple front-stage personae requires acceptance from the various audiences involved. Sophia frequently shifts personae from the endurance athlete to the social activist. In a span of three tweets Sophia moved between personae. First, she tweeted a link to an article on Mother Jones, “I Was a Warehouse Wage Slave” and followed that with a tweet about her workout “Swam 500 meters in 20 mins and felt great” and followed that with a tweet about getting body odor out of running clothes. Persona switches like this are generally tolerated in networked communities as long as the overall strength of the ties between members remains strong (Christakis and Fowler, 2009).

For Phile, her dual fronts of ironman and cause promoter are so intertwined they are actually two halves of the same mask. Even their origin story is the same. On her About page of her blog, Won’t Stop Me, Phile writes how it was the pain she felt by the end of completing her first walking half marathon that led her to see a doctor and the subsequent diagnosis of a degenerative nerve disease. The disease grew progressively worse, to the point where walking up the stairs became painful. Phile believed that if perhaps she became more fit, she could slow the
progression of the disease. In 2007, she completed her first triathlon. “And by 2009 I finally accepted that in order to live life fully, I would need to figure out how to live with CMT. I committed to the triathlon lifestyle, and with it the aim of finding balance between work, sport, and my health.” Phile competes in all types of events, including championship level Paralympic events. Her blog site reflects the singular nature of her dual persona. There you will find a blend of her life as an endurance athlete as well as her devotion to helping to find a cure for the disease she is afflicted with. Because she has always presented herself in this dual-role, tweets such as “For more details about CMTAthletes, for anyone supporting @CMTASTAR and the search for a cure, check out www.cmtausa.org – left side bar!” seem right in character.

Patterns of participation as shaped by the media.

Patterns of participation were also shaped by the medium involved. Twitter mediated short conversations requiring relatively simple posts between individuals, as shown in this Twitter conversation between Zenon, in North Carolina, and me, in Pennsylvania, about his trip to Las Vegas where I find out he was in a car accident:

Me: “Have a good time in Vegas?”
Zenon: “I did, but was in a near fatal car wreck on the way home from the airport, Luckily a half second saved my life.”
Me: “Holy crap. How are you doing?”
Zenon: “luckily only some minor aches and pains. Airbags save me, but the car was totaled.”
Me: “Man, I’m glad to hear you’re okay.”
Zenon: “I really thought I was a goner. So lucky!”
Zenon: “get out there a run for both of us!”

However community members may jump from Twitter to Facebook for conversations requiring a larger text field. This conversation between Eunike, in Scotland, Timo in Missouri, and me, in Pennsylvania, is an example of one that began on Twitter and switched over to Facebook. The three of us, along with Phile, in London, like to read the same kinds of fiction. Eunike, Timo, and I formed a group in Facebook called the Transcontinental Book Club.
club has two additional members from Brazil, who are not endurance athletes and not in the study. This is a conversation about the fantasy series Game of Thrones.

On Twitter:
Phile: “@Eunike, @Timo, @jeffswain topic change – how is everyone doing on game of thrones?”
Eunike: “@Phile, @Timo, @jeffswain I should be finished bk1 tonight or tomorrow, and halfway through watching season 1. Love it.”
Timo: “@Phile, @Eunike, @jeffswain I just started the second book. Love it.”
Timo: “@Phile, @Eunike, @jeffswain the series is not on iTunes…just preview episodes.”
Eunike: “@Phile, @Timo, @jeffswain I found a couple of full length episodes on YouTube which I was surprised at”
Timo: “@Phile, @Eunike, @jeffswain Oh! I’ll check there.”
Phile: “@Eunike, @Timo, @jeffswain HBOnline will have them in the US. I’m on Book 3 part 2, halfway through. It is seriously gripping!”

The conversation moved to Facebook when Eunike posted an update on the book club page:
Eunike: “I’m nearly finished. This book has definitely had me giggling at some of the use of language. One of my favorite quotes has to be ‘they’re both bungholes who think they’re too noble to sh*t, but never mind about that.’ Got hold of episode 1 of the tv drama which aired 9in the UK – not sure about the US) last year, and watched it yesterday just to see if it was any good – it got rave reviews at the time. I thoroughly enjoyed it. However, it moved at quite a pace, I assume to get everything into the 60 mins, but was enjoyable all the same. The book is far better, but isn’t it always? Saying that, the way they’ve captured the darkness of the story is exceptional, and some of the shots are fabulous. Well worth watching if you can.”
Timo: “I’ve got the first episode on my iPad to watch. I think I’ll enjoy it too!”
Eunike: “You will for sure! I’m onto ep4 now – it’s as addictive as the book 😊”
Me: “I’ll have to check it out. My sister digs the show.”
Eunike: “Season 2 is starting here in April. Have you already had it? How are you both getting about in book 2?”
Me: “I’m about 20% through. I bought book 2 on my iPad so the page numbers are screwy. I found the flow the same. It makes an easy transition. Like a continuous story. No need to re-orient yourself to the setting & characters.”
Timo: “Do you like reading on your iPad? My mom has taken over my kindle some so I’ve been reading on mine. Doesn’t bother my eyes like I thought it might. I’ve barely started book two, though.”
Me: “actually I don’t mind it. I’m able to get lost in the story. I was worried about that but I’ve read three books so far on it.”

These conversations on the same subject indicate how the benefits and limitations of each medium play into the pattern of participation. For community members Twitter is the first place to go to post. The discussion on the topic took place between four community members (Phile, Eunike, Timo, and myself). Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters. However, on average 25 characters were lost because members included each other’s names in their posts. Leaving 115 characters left for conversation. Conversations on Twitter are done this way because the @ followed by the name lets the individual know 1) they are being invited to join in a conversation and 2) that the conversation is continuing for as long as this established convention is followed. When the @ pattern is broken by someone, it is a signal to the others that they are dropping out of the conversation. They may still be present on Twitter just no longer participating in the conversation. The use of the @ is also a visual cue to others that a conversation is taking place. This convention is necessitated by the flat structural hierarchy of Twitter where private conversations between a group if individuals is not supported. Compare that with the architecture of Facebook, which does allow for private groups. It also has no character limit for the size of posts. The disadvantage to using Facebook is that most of the community members are connected on Twitter, where they originally connected.

The architecture of DailyMile also influences the type of conversation that takes place between community members. DailyMile is a hybrid site combining the theme-based setting of a
discussion forum or newsgroup with the flat construction allowing for a never ending flow of information found on sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Throughout the study, DailyMile was the place where members posted their workout data, which many had auto-set to post to Twitter or Facebook. Conversation did take place on DailyMile as community members commented on each other’s workout but the conversation did not branch out beyond the theme of exercise at any time. This post by Eunike and reply by Zenon capture the typical DailyMile interaction found throughout the study.

Eunike: Forest – **4 mi/00:41 10:13 pace**. A nice run with the Hubs in the drizzle, and BIG newsflash…NO ICE…Yay!! Was lovely to be able to run without my yaktrax for once. Done as 4:1 and felt really strong albeit it with a bit of tightness in my glutes and hip flexors – a common problem for me after a long run, and another reminder that I need to stretch more.”

Zenon: “Stretch stretch like Gumby!”

DailyMile posts can also be more technical or training related such as this post from Aphrodisios:

**“Powell High Track & Victor Ashe Park 8.3 mi**

8.3 miles = 800m warmup + 5 X 800m @ 2:43 (jog 400m in between) + 4.3 @ 7:45 pace. This was my first 800 repeats in a while. Felt pretty good, but I knew I could not do 10 at that pace. It will come with time and practice. :)

DailyMile sends a weekly training report in email form to its members. Many members also choose to have their weekly stats automatically posted to Twitter and Facebook. Here is an example of this type of post Cleopatra has set to post to Twitter: “My training last week: 3 workouts for 55.45 km and 1600 calories burned [with a link to her full statistics for the week on DailyMile]. Here is an example of the same kind of auto-post only to Facebook by Timo: “Timo ran and rode 28.56 mi last week [with a link to her full weekly statistics on DailyMile].
Patterns of participation taking place over a theme-specific timeframe.

As an event grows near, it is not uncommon for a community member to focus their status updates on their mood, assessment of fitness, goals, and anxieties brought out by the upcoming race. An example of this is found in the experience of Aphrodios before and after he ran the Knoxville Marathon on April 1, 2012.

Aphrodios tweets on March 27, 2012 (5 days before the marathon)
“…and taper madness sets in!
“2 miles…just enuff to warm up and stretch. Taper time. “Dress Rehearsal” tomorrow ☺ [with a link to a longer update on DailyMile]”
Three hours later he tweeted:
“If you have put in the proper training, the race is just a victory lap #runchat”
Five hours later he tweeted:
“Retweet if running is a part of who you are! #runchat. #RockTheRun”

Aphrodios tweets on March 28, 2012, (4 days before the marathon)
“The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion when no one is watching” – A. Dorrance”
Eleven hours later he tweeted:
“Love, Hate, & the Taper” with a link to a blog post he published in October 2011 about the psychological conflict a runner feels as he decreases his mileage leading up to a race. The purpose of the taper is to allow the body to rest and heal in order to be as healthy as possible the day of the race. However, the idea of running less goes against the mindset of a distance runner.

Aphrodios tweets on March 29, 2012 (3 days before the marathon)
“I plan to be at the Expo around 12:30 or 1 on Saturday to pick up my packet for Knoxville Marathon ☺”
“Teacher drops 100 pounds, running Covenant Health Knoxville half marathon [with a link to the news article]”

Three hours later he tweeted, “Now I have a severe case of POSITIVE premarathon jitters. Gotta stay calm and smart!!!”

Later that day he tweeted:

“5 mile dress rehearsal in full marathon gear. Warmup, short runs at race pace, cooldown. It is way too easy to go fast. Gotta stay slow!”

“Marathoners: What do you eat the day before a #marathon? #runchat”

“Today is the first day of the rest of your taper.”

Aphrodisios tweets on March 30, 2012 (2 days before the marathon)

“I plan to be at the Expo at around 12:30 or 1 on Saturday to pick up my packet for the Knoxville Marathon & say Howdy ☺ [name removed]

An hour later I tweeted this:

“@RunWise I so dig the way you’re preparing. I am going to adopt a lot of what you do when training for the Marine Corps Marathon. Thanks”

To which Aphrodisios replied:

“@jeffswain Thanks! I got most of my ideas from Dr. Jack Daniels, Hal Higdon, & other experienced marathon folks. ☄” [Jack Daniels is a reference to the whiskey. Hal Higdon is a marathoner who posts training guidelines online.]

A few minutes after our exchange Aphrodisios tweeted,

“Knoxville Marathon runs to a new high [with a link to a news article about the marathon].”

“Eating extra carbs today for the Knoxville Marathon on Sunday. Potatoes, pancakes, & rice FTW! [For the Win].”

“This is what my training plan looks like after 3 months…[a picture of his notebook containing his plans].”

“When your body is saying it has nothing left to give, it is time to call on your spirit & finish the race.”

“Just a little 2 mile jog in the park to loosen up. Rest day tomorrow. ☺ [with a link to a detailed post on DailyMile] #runchat.”
Aphrodisios does not post again until after the marathon. He developed stomach issues during the marathon and had to drop out before completing the course, a DNF in event terms [Did Not Finish]. This was an exchange we had on April 2, the day after the race.

Aphrodisios: “Still feeling a little ill today, but making it through the day…
Me: “@RunWise “Hope it passes soon. Remember it’s just an aberration.”
Aphrodisios “favorited” the tweet. Favorites are tweets that are saved to a separate twitter page so they can be referenced again later.

He tweeted about the experience again on April 3, two days after the marathon, “A Time To Stop Running (blog post on my first DNF)” with a link to the post. In the post Aphrodisios writes about how he “trained harder and smarter before” and “planned more carefully, and “ate & drank more carefully, how he did everything the right way only to have it go wrong on race day. He chalks up his stomach issues he had on the day of the race to being one of those unfortunate things that just happens, “it just wasn’t my day.” What Aphrodisios did not know then was that his ailment the day of the race would lead to him being diagnosed with a gluten allergy later. At the end of the blog post Aphrodisios returned to his primary persona of an educator/supporter by closing the post with:

“I will continue to share my journey and hope my response to this situation will give hope to other folks that have to stop in a race.
Stopping during a race when you are hurting doesn’t not make you a quitter. It means that you want to be healthy. It means that you intend to keep trying on another day. That is not quitting. That is running wise.”

Sometimes a community member will tweet live during an event. Syntyche is a mother of a young child and lives with her daughter and husband outside of New Orleans. Syntyche wears a tutu when she runs an event. On Saturday, February 27, she ran the Mardis Gras Mambo 10K with her husband. They brought their baby along pushing taking turns pushing him in a stroller during the run. In this series of tweets Syntyche shares part of her experience before and after the race.
Syntych: “Annnnnnd Done #RunLA #tutu [with a photo of her wearing a pink long-sleeved running shirt and a green and blue tutu.” The photo is a “selfie” meaning Syntyche took the photo of herself using her camera phone and standing in front of a mirror. It is common practice for community members to take and share pictures this way.

Annnnnnd Done! #RunLA #tutu pic.twitter.com/DPXAMkop

Later Syntyche posted a photo of herself and a friend near the start of the race. Her husband using her phone takes this photo. “At #MGM10K and found @[name removed] and @[name removed]. #RunLa [and the photo].” The photo was automatically posted to Twitter using an application called UberSocial for Blackberry.

Seven minutes later Syntyche posts another picture of her with her husband and their baby. “The [name removed] is ready to race!!! @[baby’s name] is all bundled up! #RunLA #MGM10 [with the photo]”. This photo was taken by one of her friends whom she met at the race.
Ninety minutes later Syntyche posted a photo of her holding her baby at the end of the race. “Done!!!! Such a fun, fun race! @[baby’s name] did great for his first 10K! [with the photo]”. This photo was taken by her husband.

The tweets of Aphrodisios and Syntyche are examples of how different community members share their experiences before, during, and after an event. The tone of the tweets depends on the individual and the importance placed on the event.

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected over the period of the study, January 16-April 13, 2012. The data collected included twitter updates, blog posts, Facebook status updates, Dailymile updates, and podcasts. My analysis of the data is framed by my two research questions. (1) What are the norms, practices, and markers of running the community? (2) What patterns of participation or membership are presented in the community? Twenty-one members of my running community (11 females and 10 males) agreed to participate in the study. Participants were spread out over six time zones. The field site for this study was comprised of a collection of websites through which the study participants moved through and interacted with each other. These sites were Twitter, Facebook, DailyMile, the participant’s personal blogs and podcasts, and sites referenced by the participants. Twitter served as the main intercept point for the study because that is where the majority of interaction took place.

This study explored the functioning’s of one networked community of runners found on the social web. A community is defined as a group of individuals who come together based on common interests, beliefs, or values. Networked communities are no longer bound by place but have through the social web morphed into a series of overlapping networks in which each individual resides at the center of his or her own networks.

Two types of primary personas were identified: personal/reflective and educational/supporter. Personal/reflective persona types were distinguished by inviting the reader into their world in order to create a shared experience. Educational/supportive persona types had an outward facing style designed to let the reader know they were there to help them. Community
members created profile pages that reflected their particular persona. Both personas displayed the three communication practices identified (conversational, inspirational, and promotional).

Patterns of participation are the ways in which community members interact. Patterns are the means by which members choose to share information, interact with and support one another. The way an individual chooses to participate is based on the primary persona he or she displayed. Patterns of participation in the community are dependent upon the individuals staying in character. To function in an overlapping network of communities requires individuals to occasionally break character; there are times when individuals abandon one front for another, to switch from one front-stage persona to another. The ability to have multiple front-stage personas requires acceptance from the various audiences involved.

The media involved also shapes patterns of participation. Due to its flat architecture and character limitation, Twitter requires users to post small updates. Also, various conventions, such as the use of the ampersand (@) are adopted to provide a visual cue for directed conversations. Facebook allows for private groups and also has a larger character limit. DailyMile is set up as a place for community members to share workout information. As such, conversation is generally limited to the topic of fitness.

Finally, patterns of participation were shaped by a specific theme-based timeframe, such as the week leading up to and after a marathon. During this period the individual’s communication practices are primarily focused on the event.
Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary

Researchers are just beginning to explore the impact of the social web. However, there is a growing sentiment among social scientists that if we are to truly understand the phenomenon, we must study it in the context of everyday life (Markham, 1998; Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Mann and Stewart, 2002; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002; Wilson, 2008). This study hoped to add to this understanding following a community of endurance athletes over a three-month period (January 16-April 13, 2012) in an attempt to gain insight into how community members presented themselves to one another and how they interacted as a community. The purpose of the study was to provide insight into how individuals relate to one another using social networking sites.

What differentiates communities on the social web from our traditional understanding of community (both offline and online) is that these communities are no longer bound by place but have morphed into a series of overlapping networks in which each individual resides at the center of his or her own network(s). The effect enabled individuals to “personalize their own communities” (Wellman, et al., 2002). Rather than being defined by geography or setting, it may now be best to define communities by their meaning to the individual. This means the boundaries that distinguish a community from the rest of the world may exist “symbolically” in the minds of its members (Cohen, 2008). The placement of the individual at the center of their networks also means that the boundaries between communities are more permeable. Often these networks overlap and are visible to everyone connected to the individual making it possible for members of one community to connect with members of other communities (boyd & Ellison, 2008). “Rather than relating to one group, people live and work in multiple sets of overlapping relationships, cycling among different networks” (Wellman et al. 2002, p. 160).

A review of the followers (Twitter) and friends (Facebook) lists indicated that study participants were connected with endurance athletes as well as others who were not endurance athletes. However, despite being the center of a series of personal networks (Katz, et al, 2004), all
(19) study participants with Twitter accounts identify themselves as an athlete in their profile either through text and/or images. Sixteen of the nineteen participants regularly tweet about things related to running (workout plans, physical health, mental state, nutrition, race plans, gear, etc.). The theme of thirteen of fourteen participants who had blogs was about endurance sports (running, swimming, cycling). The four participant podcasts were about endurance sports.

This study was a multi-sited, or connective, ethnography (Hine 2000; Wilson 2006), integrating traditional and virtual ethnographic methods to better understand how a community of runners constructs their social world in combined online spaces. The “field site as method” approach was employed for the study. This method allowed me to establish “some form of literal, physical presence by following the logic of association” among these sites (Marcus, 1995, p. 190). The networked approach to field work allowed the opportunity to follow things wherever they lead thus enabling the researcher to develop an understanding of the social dynamics involved within the community by teasing them out from the other kinds of information flow going on. Burrell (2009) defined this process as foregrounding.

In following the flow of individuals and information across websites, blogs, and the social applications Twitter, Facebook, and DailyMile, two kinds of persona styles, were identified: (1) The personal/reflective style that is focused inward and tends to communicate in a revelatory manner that invites the reader into their world; and (2) The educator/supporter style. Individuals using this style have an outward facing persona that is focused on how they can teach and inspire the reader. Study participants adopted one of these sub-personas as part of their primary persona of an endurance athlete.

Three types of communication practices were observed: 1) conversational practices, 2) inspirational practices, and 3) promotional practices. Study participants took part in these practices in their adopted sub-persona. Markers of membership in the community provided credibility and conferred status on the individuals of both personality types. Participants used fixed and transitory makers as a means of displaying their adopted persona.

Three kinds of participation patterns were observed: (1) Patterns of participation as it related to the individual’s adopted persona; (2) Patterns of participation as shaped by the media; and (3) Patterns of participation that took place over a theme-specific timeframe.

The main conclusions of this study were:

• Despite being in front of multiple audiences, individuals will display a primary persona on the social web.
• Communication practices demonstrated the interplay required between human and non-human factors needed to develop and maintain online communities.
• Patterns of participation indicate how far the Internet has become ingrained in our lives.

Conclusions

Despite being in front of multiple audiences individuals will display a primary persona on the social web.

Study participants primarily used social networks so they could further pursue the development of a specific aspect of their person (that of an endurance athlete). This conclusion is consistent with the findings of previous studies of self-presentation on the Web (boyd, 2008; boyd and Heer, 2006; Burkhalter, 1999; Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2007; Harcourt, 1999; Lange, 2008; Livingstone, 2008; Lysoff, 2003; Walstrom, 2000; Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2006).

Participants assumed a primary persona in a manner consistent with Goffman’s (1959) notion of front “that part of the…performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (p.22). However, they did so in a networked environment where they were not only performing for their intended audience (other endurance athletes), but they were also performing in front of their unintended audience (non-athletes, friends, family members, and co-workers). This suggests that individuals must adopt a strategy for managing the way they present themselves in this blended context. Several strategic possibilities will be presented in the Discussion section.

A review of the followers and friends lists of the study participants suggests that they used the social web not to connect with people they know in the physical world as suggested by boyd and Ellison (2008), but rather participants used the social web to find and interact with those with whom they have a common interest. Only one pairing, Giane and Theodosios, interact offline as well. The remaining participants all connected virtually via social networking sites. This observation is consistent with the work of Radcliffe-Brown on social structures. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) observed relationships between individuals were not the result of a “similarity of
interests, but rests either on the mutual interest of persons in one another, or on one or more common interests, or on a combination of both of these” (p.9). Radcliffe-Brown distinguishes between similar and common interests and posits that common interests represent stronger ties between individuals. In this study participants came together over a common interest in endurance sports and also displayed this interest as part of their primary persona.

**Communication practices demonstrated the interplay required between human and non-human factors needed to develop and maintain online communities.**

Walker (2010) noted, when we think of society, we need to think of it in terms of a heterogeneous collection of people, technology, and things interacting with each other. This kind of interaction was observed in the communication practices used by the participants during the study. Study participants used multiple kinds of devices and applications to create and consume information. Tweets and status updates frequently contained footnotes “sent from my Blackberry,” “sent my from Android,” or “sent from my iPhone” when individuals were using their mobile device. Camera phones were commonly used to post pictures. These updates frequently occurred “in situ” meaning the individual was sharing what was happening in the moment whether they were in line at the coffee shop, making dinner, or at the start of a race.

Communities formed on the web lack a physical or geographical space where community members can be together in the moment. Bird and Barber (2002) noted that “non-place communities develop norms and institutional memories based on common experiences” (p.131). In this study community members used several communication practices to achieve this outcome. In real-time the communication practices served as a means of creating a sense of community space, even if only symbolically in the minds of the community members (Cohen, 2008). After a brief period of time, the outcome of these practices (tweets, blog posts, podcasts) became artifacts, because they were always available, and served as a buttress supporting the symbolic concept of community. The symbiotic relationship between the function of “live” updates and artifacts meets Rheingold’s (1993) definition of virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on...public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p.3).

Communities are built around and share a common culture where we are able to “...communicate, perpetuate, and develop knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz,
The social web has made it possible for communities to form around both online and offline relationships in effect enabling individuals to “personalize their own communities” (Wellman, et al., 2002). In this study, individuals came together over a common interest in endurance sports and formed a community through the use of devices that enabled them to share an experience as it was happening. Over time the information shared became an artifact that served to solidify the feeling of community in the minds of the members. These two factors helped to overcome the lack of geographical and physical connectedness.

**Patterns of participation indicate how far the Internet has become ingrained in our lives.**

The Internet has been “pervasively incorporated into people’s lives” (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002). It has become another place for us to routinely meet and interact with others, particularly others with which we share common interests (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). In a 2010 study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 47% of adults who are on the Web use a social networking service (SNS) such as Twitter or Facebook. Nineteen percent of adult responders indicated they had a profile on Twitter, and 73% indicated they had a profile on Facebook. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of adults who responded to the study survey indicated they had a profile on two SNS, and 13% had a profile on three or more SNS. In this study nineteen of twenty-one participants had a Twitter account. The average number of tweets for the participants at the time of the study was 19,275. Seventeen participants had a Facebook account and eighteen had a DailyMile account. Thirteen participants had accounts on all three social web services.

The content of tweets, blog posts, and podcasts support the notion that individuals use these sites to “facilitate the intensification of pre-existing characteristics of social life” (Murthy, 2012). A review of About pages found on blogs as well as Twitter profile pages indicates that the study participants are looking to intensify the endurance athlete aspect of their lives. The majority of tweets and Facebook updates collected during the study had to do with an aspect of the persona of an endurance athlete (training, fitness, nutrition, gear, events). Since endurance sports require large commitments of time, effort, and resources, it can be said that one’s identification as an endurance athlete is a meaningful part of that individual’s life. By proxy it can be concluded that participating in a community of endurance athletes on the web serves a key role in supporting that identification.
Implications For Teaching and Learning

Communities of Practice and Teaching and Learning

The practices of the endurance community in this study meet the three characteristics of a CoP, as defined by Wenger (20011). First, community members were brought together because of a shared common interest in endurance sports. Members invest a lot of themselves in this interest through long, and time-consuming training regimes, substantial diet and lifestyle changes, traveling to events, and researching products and gear. Second, Members share their experiences with and learn from each other through the social network sites Dailymile, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as through their personal blogs and podcasts (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2006; Lave & Wegner, 1991; & Wegner, 2011). It is by communicating through this networked environment where members create a shared sense of meaning and competence that distinguishes them from the others (Wegner, 2011). Finally, community members are themselves endurance athletes, participating in marathons, ultra-marathons, and triathlons. According to Wegner (2011) without these three characteristics (domain, community, and practice) a CoP cannot exist.

Taken on its face value, CoP appear to be a method that could be taken from the realm of informal learning and used toward positive ends in a formal environment, such as a course taken over a semester. However, creating a CoP in formal educational settings can be problematic for several reasons. According to Wegner (2011) there is an implied commitment in the individual’s interest in the domain that transcends a general interest in a topic. This scenario may not be present in the course setting where not all students share a deep interest in the topic. A student may be taking the course to fill a requirement, such as an elective, or he or she may not have an interest in the topic beyond what they need to know to get a passing grade. In situations such as these, the intrinsic motivation required of the individual to be part of a CoP may not be present.

Describing the characteristics required of a community, Wegner states that members “…engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from one another” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). Instructors can design the curriculum so students will work together in teams, but this environment is one that is created by the instructor and imposed on the students and not an environment the student would choose to enter in if he or she was given the choice. Whereas, Wegner’s definition implies that an individual desires to join the community rather than being assigned to one. A second problematic
area involves relationship building. Building the kinds of relationships necessary for a CoP requires an extended period of time for the individuals to grow comfortable enough with one another to the point where a deep understanding of the topic can occur. It is questionable that the bounded time frame of a semester is ample enough for the necessary comfort level to develop.

Finally, Wegner requires that individual members must be practitioners, actually engaging in activities related to the domain of interest. Team projects, assigned by the instructor, about a specific topic may not include the students actively engaging in the domain. Or, the instructor may design the activity in such a manner that students engage peripherally around the domain or through simulation. In either scenario it is questionable whether the students are participating at the level required by Wegner for a CoP.

**Limitations**

Three limitations must be noted. The researcher is a long-standing member of the community that was studied. As such, I was naturally the center point in this networked community. Selecting another member as the center point would have produced a vastly different networked community and, possibly, different findings and conclusions. This is certainly an avenue for further study. A second limitation was in capturing data. Screenshots of Twitter feeds and blog posts, etc., were done intermittently, every 2-3 days on average. As such, a total picture of what took place over the four months of the study cannot be made. However, I believe that with my intimate knowledge of the community and the participants in the study, the data collected is more than sufficient to support the findings of the study. A third limitation is in the lack of interviews done during the study.

**Implications For Future Research**

This study supports the argument that in order to understand the impact the Internet, it must be studied in the context of everyday life (Burrell, 2009; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Hine, 2000; Marcus, 1995 Markham, 1998; Miller and Slater, 2000; Murthy, 2012; Walker, 2010; Wellman, Boase, and Chen, 2010). In this study individuals interested in endurance sports used social networking sites to find others who shared this common interest, as defined by Radcliffe-
Brown (1940). In their book *Connected: The Surprising Power of Social Networks*, Christakis and Fowler (2009) documented how strongly our social networks influence us. How like breeds like. They cite several examples including how college students with roommates who study a lot tend to adopt such habits themselves or how homeowners with neighbors who keep up the outside of their homes tend to do the same (p.22). The findings present by Christakis and Fowler suggest that perhaps one of the benefits of seeking out others who share a common interest is that connecting with them may increase ones persistence in pursuing that interest. While this was not the intent of this study, the data found indicate this as a possible area for further exploration.

Questions to explore include: Does participation in a networked community increase persistence in pursuit of an activity? Why do individuals seek out others with common interests on the Web? Can the needs being met in these relationships also be met offline? If so, what are the benefits of choosing one over the other?

Radcliffe-Brown (1940) also identified how relationships between individuals are stronger if the individual’s involved share a common interest in each other or share multiple common interests. A review of the tweets and blog posts collected during the study indicates that besides endurance sports and the things that pertain to them individuals also may have common interests in food as an epicurean pursuit, eclectic music styles, select kinds of beer and cocktails, and environmental and social justice issues. While this was not the intent of this study, the data indicate a possible area for further exploration lies in what decision factors go into following/friending someone and what factors go into determining maintaining the relationship.

A study by Qie, et al (2011) measured the personality traits of 142 participants on Twitter over a period of one month and found strangers used linguistic cues to make judgments on agreeableness and neuroticism. It would be interesting to study what cues individuals who identify themselves as endurance athletes use.

Another avenue of exploration raised by this study concerns performance management. Study participants primarily used social networks so they could further pursue the development of a specific aspect of their person (that of an endurance athlete). However, they did so in a networked environment where they were not only performing for their intended audience (other endurance athletes), but they were also performing in front of their unintended audience (non-athletes, friends, family members, and co-workers). One could infer from this study that by adopting the primary persona of an endurance athlete, study participants were able to construct a social situation where they exert some control over the expectations of the audience (Goffman, 1959; Chambers 2012). Having a primary persona as an endurance athlete meant there was the
possibility for dissonance among the people who knew the individual in a different context, such as a family member or co-worker. Goffman (1959) observed that each individual has multiple fronts, or personas, and the front the individual chooses to use are based upon the audience whom he or she is performing for. Overlapping networks on the social web create an issue of audience management for the individual. Several methods were employed that use pseudonyms, making it difficult for those who know you in another context to find you. One participant used Twitter for endurance sports and Facebook for family and friends. Another participant kept her accounts private and only followed/friended those whom she feels there will not be a conflict. However, these instances are not enough and more exploration into this area is needed before any insight can be given.

Gunawardena et al. (2008, p.4) define the act of social networking as “the practice of expanding knowledge by making connections with individuals of similar interests.” But how do we interact with these like others while performing before a blended audience? Hogan (2010) offers a possible explanation in his differentiation between online and offline friends: “If we consider online friends not as a means for signifying those with whom we have close relations but those with whom we want to manage access to content, we can refocus both what a friend means online and how to manage the surging lists of friends on many social network sites” (p.383).

But do we make this distinction between online and offline friends as clearly as Hogan suggests? Facebook privacy setting enable graduated levels of access to information but sites such as Twitter do not. So how do we make distinctions in different environments? And do we? This study suggests that one possible means of audience management is in the adoption of a primary persona. It is possible that by assuming a primary persona the individual signals to everyone in their audience of the role they intend to play. This, is turn, lets the audience know what to expect and how to react. Further investigation into this possibility is needed to see if using a consistent persona/message is a way of managing overlapping social networks.
References


Fiegerman, S. (2012). Twitter now has more than 200 million monthly active users, from Mashable http://mashable.com/2012/12/18/twitter-200-million-active-users/


Appendix A

Sample Email Inviting Individuals To Participate In The Study

Hi {name of potential participant}

This is fellow runner Jeff Swain. We’ve known each other for a while via Twitter, Facebook, dailymile, our blogs, and podcasts and I’m asking for your assistance.

You probably know through our communication that while a marathoner I’m also a doctoral candidate in the field of education at Penn State University. For my dissertation I’m exploring the impact the social web is having on how we present ourselves to each other as well as how we come together to form communities. I’m using our running community as an example of how this happens and I’d like to solicit your personal input. Is this something you would be interested in doing?

If so, your participation would not take up a large amount of time. To provide you with some context, I am studying the dynamics of our community as we progress through a marathon season. I’m interested in documenting our experiences from the beginning of training through the end of the event for which we trained. Most of the things I’m interested in we already publicly share (training progress, fitness reports, as well as life experiences we must meet while training). My hope is that by doing this I will gain a better understanding of the interplay the social web has on our development as individuals and a culture. This information will further inform how my field of interest, education, develops learning environments.

Does this sound like something you would be interested in participating? If so, here is what I would need you to do.

1. Virtually nothing. That is, I would like us to continue on as we already do. Please do not alter your communication in any way because you think it would help me. Please just be you. For the purposes of doing the analysis for this research study, I will collect your posts via screen shots and trace your interactions through them.

2. Occasionally I may ask you to help me further understand what is happening. This could be about something you said or something else happening in the community. Preferably we could do this via Skype but if that is not convenient an email exchange will suffice. In order to maintain the fidelity of our conversation I would like to audio record our Skype interactions.
3. Help me make certain I understand a given situation by reviewing my notes. After we talk I will write up my interpretation of what is happening and I would like to offer you the opportunity to read and add your input by providing your interpretation of events.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if you are willing and able to participate. Note that no real names will be used in the study. You may also decline or withdraw from the study at any time. Also, please know that your decision will in no way impact my feelings toward you and the value I place on our relationship.

Sincerely,

Jeff
VITA

William Jeffrey Swain

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New Education Technologies Project Manager 2006
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PUBLICATIONS

Swain, Jeff (submitted) The Impact of the Social Web on Identity and Community: An Ethnographic Study of a Community of Endurance Athletes. Submitted to the Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research
Department of Teaching and Learning with Technology